







THINKER OR  
BELIEVER ?





# THINKER OR BELIEVER?

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## P R E F A C E

Is truth desired? Nine out of ten people, if asked that question, would answer it with a clanging affirmative. But do people make any attempt to get to the bottom of the well where truth lies hidden? Comparatively few.

Life is a jazz affair for many. For others it is business, sport, pleasure, worry, eating, drinking, and sleeping. There seems to be no time to *think*.

It is surely a strange thing that the world has not outdistanced the intellectual output of Ancient Greece. How did it happen that a little State, so many years ago, flung up a band of intellectual giants, whose work is a beacon to the finest minds to-day? Knowledge has come in its desultory fashion, but wisdom still lingers.

In Ancient Greece Socrates tried to make people think. He saw they believed instead of thinking, and he set himself to cure them. He called ignorance sinfulness. For him ignorance was the unforgivable sin.

That sin is rampant to-day. People accept what they are told with a credulity that amazes. Men calling themselves leaders preach ideas that have no substance and spread tales that have no truth. And few there are that challenge them.

There will be no health in us until we have a hunger and thirst after truth. If a creed is false, it should be spurned. No man or woman should be cowardly enough to be afraid of truth. When reason and unreason meet no one should shirk the issue.

This book has been written for the man and woman at the hearth and the man and woman in the pew. What we urge is that people shall not merely pay a lip service to truth, but shall seek it. Lies are an abomination, and so long as we are content to cherish them we can have no hope of moral or intellectual betterment.

The people of any country who become filled with a zeal for truth will light such a lamp in the world that the ages will not extinguish it.

W. H. W.

*March, 1928.*

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## CHAPTER I

### BELIEVER OR THINKER?—IS THE BIBLE INSPIRED?

THERE are few subjects upon which intelligent people are so ill informed as their religion. Children are led to religion and told to drink of its waters with the threat that if they don't they will surely die. They have no choice in the matter—and parents merely do to their children as they were done by. So we grow up with fear linked to religion, and that is the most terrible and the most enduring of all masters. Hell is the punishment of those who disbelieve; Heaven is the reward of believers. What we learn in fear we can unlearn only after a desperate effort. So we go on believing.

Those who have lived in a religious atmosphere know the torture of religious doubt. In nearly all other problems that arise one can freely set out the difficulty; but religious doubt is a sin: it is something born of the devil; it is something to be hidden; it is unsympathizable. Some "why" or "how" has crept into the mind and shaken the religious content. Hows and whys must go out by prayer and fasting if need be, but go they must. We daren't struggle with question and accept the logical consequences.

There is the tragedy for the race. It has been the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind. The mind is the one thing that set man above the animals, and man has been stamping on mind not merely for two thousand years, but from the intellectual dawn.

Race has had and still has a "herd" value, though it has brought countless catastrophes upon the earth;

but what wars and rumours of wars have we not seen motivated solely by religion ! And, above all, there has been the ceaseless war against thinking. Religion may have had its saints, but it has slain its thinkers. "Thou shalt not think" has been the first commandment of the Church, no matter the creed.

Belief being considered the essential, it was clear no gainsaying of the creed could be allowed. But there were intelligences that doubted and questioned and rebelled. They were ruthlessly repressed. To doubt was the sin against the Holy Ghost. So the race grew up, sheep-like, obedient, accepting.

And to-day, when men no longer need fear the stake if they disagree with the priests, they still cling to the teaching they received in their childhood, and refuse to inquire whether it is true or not. Fear of a sort still oppresses them. Many, who feel that they do not and cannot accept all that the Church teaches, still bow down in the House of Rimmon and pay tribute to custom and ancient creed.

The fear of truth is the worst fear a man can have. It must check intellectual adventure and all fine soaring. It is pitiful to think that intelligence should be warped, that men should refuse to weigh evidence or to use their reason because of some ghostly fear that refuses argument. There is a satisfaction gained from the pursuit of truth that is to blind acceptance of the undemonstrable as light to darkness.

Scientific people make mistakes ; but the atmosphere of science is one of truth. Every theory in the realm of science cries out unceasingly : "Test me ; test me." The atmosphere of religion is authority. "Believe," says the voice of the teacher, and in ancient days his was the voice of one really possessing authority. Who disbelieved died. And though the ruthless age is past, yet we still find the atmosphere of religion one of credulity, and credulity is a sin

against the species. Even to-day men and women are bidden to believe and not to question. If they have doubts and wish to inquire, they are prayed over and treated emotionally; the forces of religion encompass them. But they are not reasoned with.

This is surely wrong. Reason is man's guide. Reason cannot be answered with unreason. To tell a man not to use his reason in religious matters is to tell him to stultify the only part of him that has value.

What would the priest say to a man who hesitated to believe that Jonah lived three days in a whale's belly? He could say: "The story is in the Bible; the Bible is the Word of God, therefore the story is true." The doubter would reply: "How do you know that the Bible is the Word of God?"

"The Church has said so," would be the reply of the priest.

"And how does the Church know?"

The priest has no valid answer. The Church asserts that the Bible is the Word of God, and in that way gains authority for it. But the Church does not offer any evidence that the Bible is God's Word. There is no just cause or impediment why the seeker after truth should not try to find out for himself whether the Bible is the Word of God or not. If the Bible is true and is the Word of God to man, then a man would be a fool who neglected its teaching; it is the most priceless thing man holds. But if the priest is wrong, if the Bible is the work of man, then let us know the truth and not be afraid. But, above all, do not let us be hypocrites. Do not let us doubt and pretend we believe. Do not let us be sure that there are certain things in the Bible that are not true, that we can "throw over," as it were, and still go on behaving as if the Bible really were the Word of God. Our reason and our courage ought to be equal to our destiny. If it is essential for us to believe

what the Church teaches, it is folly for us not to believe.

It is obviously worth while examining the claim of the Church that the Bible is the Word of God.

If the Bible has been written by men, it will contain many errors ; it will probably have myths and tales borrowed from other people and other religions ; it will express the perverse, ignorant, stupid, but sincere views of the period. It will be savage and bloodthirsty, moving and beautiful. In other words, it will reflect man through the ages.

But if it was inspired by an all-wise, all-loving, all-powerful, omniscient God, it will be a book that has none of the errors, contradictions, foolish borrowings, bloodthirstiness, savagery, and monstrosities of men.

Any reasonable person could tell the difference between a letter on a complicated issue dictated by the head of the firm and one written by the office boy. Any person of common sense, who will fearlessly read his Bible to see whether it was written by God or by men, will be able to say unhesitatingly whether it is God's or man's word.

It may be said that certain people in the Anglican and other Protestant Churches now admit that there are errors in the Bible. It is obvious that people who admit so much have conceded that the Bible is man's handiwork. The tale that God worked through human secretaries, that he inspired certain people to write, is one for which we need evidence. That evidence will be forthcoming in the written word or not at all, for there is no other evidence. We must judge whether or not a man spoke the truth when he said, "Thus saith the Lord," by considering, among other things, what he wrote. There have been fervent men, poetic men, sensual men, imaginative men, and strangely-minded men who have written

"Thus saith the Lord"; but writing did not make it so.

We must try to be sure. Our guide will be reason; our pursuit, truth.

Bishop Colenso said he was educated in this creed: "The Bible is none other than the Voice of Him that sitteth upon the Throne! Every book of it—every chapter of it—every verse of it—every word of it—every syllable of it—every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God—not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike, the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the Throne—absolute—faultless—unerring—supreme."

That is the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. It is the dogma of many Christians. It is either true or false. We must be either believers or thinkers.

## CHAPTER II

RELIGION AND SCIENCE—THE DEVELOPMENT OF MAN  
—THE IDEA OF GOD—THE WORSHIP OF THE SUN—  
“THUS SAITH THE LORD”

THE Bible begins with “The First Book of Moses, called Genesis,” and against it is fixed the date “Before Christ 4004.”

The Church, which has pretended to be the intermediary between God and man, and which has claimed authority to explain the Scriptures, has declared, as upon the word and authority of God, that the earth was made 4004 years before Christ—that is, nearly six thousand years ago. As science has shown that figure is absurd, the Church has now given up the date.

Scientists incline to the view that the earth has existed as a separate planet for something like two thousand million years. The rocks give us a history of 1,600,000,000 years.

If we could go back through these æons to observe the infancy of the earth, we should see it in its early years—the millions upon millions of years when it was a baby—as a swirling, blazing mass. In the course of time it cooled, the rocks hardened, water poured down; but there was no sign of life till approximately 1,600,000,000 years ago.

That life, simple in its early stages, has gone on developing and becoming more and more diversified and complicated. Scientific men guess at the first beginning of life, and profess candidly that they do not know how it began, though they are generally

agreed it first came from the rivers and swamps and was of the simplest description.

Till comparatively recent years the views of the appearance of life on the earth were religious views. Priests had explained scientific things according to sacerdotal ideas: the explanation of life and man on the earth, they said, was to be found in the Bible.

When Charles Darwin enunciated his theory of the development of species and his law of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, he astounded the priests, who had trusted to the Bible.

The idea that man had developed like everything else that lived disturbed people, who had pretended—and really believed—that they had in some way or other got hold of the story of the creation of the world direct from God himself. If the story came from God, then any tale from man that contradicted it must be wrong. That is obvious to anybody.

But for a good many years people have realized that men made the books that compose the Bible, and that God no more inspired or interfered with them than he directed floods which destroyed life, caused earthquakes, or answered the prayers of bloodthirsty rulers and others who asked him to let them slake their murderous desires upon their enemies.

The priest is at variance with science. The priest wants to learn only such things as fit in with his preconceived notions, his ancient prejudices, with the things which he was taught when he was a child; the man of science merely pursues truth. Nothing else matters to him.

All the fresh knowledge we accumulate goes to strengthen the view that all life has come from antecedent life, and that man has evolved in the course of time from some creature that would not be called man.

Those who fight this view are religious people as a rule. One does not want to say these people do not



care for truth, but one must say that they care more for religion. And religion, as we shall see, is a curious thing.

Science is merely organized knowledge. New facts are added to the granary of science only after they have been well and truly examined. Now and again some get past the gate because they have a plausible air ; but they are always liable to be called up for re-examination, and if they are discovered to be false they are at once discarded.

Science is not infallible, but it is guided and goaded solely by truth.

The history of religion tells us that it is not in any way akin to science. Religion, having gathered notions concerning the creation of the world, has felt very distressed when any scientific person has launched a theory which seemed to upset those notions.

The history of life on our earth runs from protoplasm to one-celled animals, to many-celled animals, amphibia, reptiles, mammals, and so to man.

From the one-celled creature to man has taken over one thousand five hundred million years. Time has been no object. And we find no evidence that during the whole of that gigantic period the Creator has ever interfered to check or choke a single law.

Life developed according to circumstance ; it was the creature of circumstance. The life that could not adapt itself to changed surroundings died. The shark was in the sea before the days of the ichthyosaurus, the pterodactyl, the mastodon, the dinosaur ; and he is still with us. It means that he has kept pace with his surroundings (his surroundings probably changing less than theirs), and they couldn't. The bear living in polar regions must develop a white fur, or it will get no food. A white bear in a forest would be a futility.

The living creatures on the earth have had to endure

terrible changes of climate or die. In the south of England great animals stalked in tropical jungles ; and then there crept down from the north the great cold that laid tooth and claw on all weak, warm creatures as far south almost as the Thames. Four times this great glacial invasion took place.

The earth, as we can see, had a mighty history long before man emerged. Traces of him in his earliest days and in the days of his immediate ancestors are slowly coming to light. Skeletons are now and again discovered, and scientific men are to-day generally agreed that man appeared on the earth about six hundred thousand years ago.

Man in his primitive days was what we should call a savage. He was physically like the man of to-day, except that he was more hairy and not quite so erect, and was very dirty, lived like a wild animal, was naked and not ashamed. What he had developed was the nucleus of a mind, just as birds developed wings.

The earth in the youthful days of man's history was a tangled forest, an arid desert, river, mountain, sea, and snow. Animals roamed about. Man, the latest comer, squatted or roamed.

For thousands upon thousands of years the live creatures pursued their several ways upon the earth. Just as other animals scattered, so did man. And it happened that some of these men developed their minds far faster than others. Some remained in an animal stage ; they differed little from the lemurs and baboons and other similar creatures. Others, however, developed quickly. A glance at the settlements of mankind would show us patches of undeveloped men and men who were leaving what we call barbarism far behind. Even to-day there are many savages on the face of the earth.

As they developed, men painted animals on walls, made ornaments, decorated themselves. As they

drew further and further from mere monkey tricks, what did they think of?

Their knowledge was limited. They knew that fire burned, that food was necessary, certain things were pleasant, and pain was disagreeable.

A shadow disturbed them.....What was this thing to them, this animal that moved there? The thunder alarmed them.....What creature roared like that?.....The lightning, the wind, the sun, the moon—all the great phenomena of nature, were mighty and intriguing things for man in his mental childhood.

Picture him as a savage. Give him time to develop. He needs thousands upon thousands of years. And it is reckoned that man has been on the earth for over six hundred thousand years. During these vast ages you can see the race develop.

But their ideas were naturally crude. They knew nothing of physical laws, and they responded to elemental calls.

As they progressed they naturally wondered about things they could not understand. What was the sun? They knew what it meant to them; but what was it? They personified it—called it a god. They personified and anthropomorphized everything. They were like children who talk to their toys and say “Naughty chair!” “Good ball!”

These early humans endowed the world with spirits and gods who were terrible in their possibilities and had to be propitiated.

Naturally mankind made most of the god that seemed most necessary or most important. All those who cultivated the ground paid respect to the sun. Without the beneficent aid of the sun they had no crops. The thoughtful man, who knew the value of sowing and reaping, would take care all the family, or all the tribe, paid proper homage to everything that could influence the crops.

You can see the priest emerging. Some of the young and careless don't pay enough attention to the ceremonies that are to win the favour of the gods. The old man has probably threatened and cudgelled at one time; but the tribe grows, and he can't go round cudgelling all the young scapegraces.

So you see him, wild-eyed and earnest, feeling desperate lest the crops should fail, telling the other members of the community with shrill note and harsher gesture what must be done, and ending: "Thus saith the Lord....."

Afterwards it tripped from his tongue: "Thus saith the Lord." As he became the leader in the ceremonial, he led off his harangues with "Thus saith the Lord," and all the child-like minds of his hearers swallowed it as unquestioningly as child-like minds have swallowed what this type of person has said even unto this day.

Children believe what they are told. They have to.

"Thus saith the Lord....." The stern, long-bearded, tough-armed man, with his hair blowing, in the wind, was obviously one who must not be questioned or gainsaid.

In two generations the idea of an old man being in touch with the gods had secured itself as firmly as the stoutest oak.

And it may be said with confidence that many, if not most, of these long-haired old men felt they were entitled to say "Thus saith the Lord," just as a foolish nurse to-day will talk to children of "bogies."

It is enough for our purpose at the moment to see how man has developed. His culture has been unrolled through the ages, and about eight thousand years or nine thousand years ago (a fairly considerable time before the date fixed and printed in the Bible as the beginning of the world and the creation of Adam)

there were people on the earth who had, for that time, a noteworthy civilization.

In Mesopotamia and Egypt human beings had gone ahead. In Britain the people were savages when the Sumerian and the Egyptian, clothed in purple and fine linen, lolled on soft couches and drank wine from cups of gold.

But they still had their ideas about gods in the tempest and the storm, in the thunder and the lightning.

The chief man was more powerful than he was in the old savage family days. He had consolidated his position. "Thus saith the Lord" had been of enormous advantage. He had been able to threaten the tribe with terrible woes if they didn't hearken to his word, which he took good care to say was the "Lord's."

In Egypt the ruler, Pharaoh, travelled so far that he became a god.

And all the people believed it.

"The office of Priest," says Professor Sayce, in *Higher Criticism*, "precedes that of King. There were High Priests of Assur before there was a King of Assyria; the Assyrian Kings, in fact, developed out of the High Priests....."

The power of the priests was unassailable. The people knew nothing; they believed what they were told, as children do now.

The priests, being themselves children in mind, continued their vain imaginings. They contrived wonderful rituals and ceremonials, and then they invented extraordinary stories to explain these rituals and ceremonials; and the wonderful thing about them is that, though these old tales were invented by priests thousands of years ago merely to explain a ceremony, yet they are accepted as *true* by many people to-day, solely because they have been handed down from generation to generation, *but always in the days of childhood, when questioning was not allowed.*

Through all these ages there has been no word that we can discover that has been uttered by the Creator of this mighty universe. There would be no mistaking such a word if we heard it. Moreover, an omniscient God, desiring to tell mankind something, would tell it like a God ; there would be no doubt, no ambiguity, no mishearing. What the Almighty God wishes, that He can do.

But we have lots of records of gods. They come from men. In other words, man made his gods and invented all that they are reported to have said. And in the days of his inventions he believed. As a child does.

What the Melanesians think, they believe. That is, if the idea of a person stealing or murdering occurs to them, they believe it as a fact. Even with civilized nations, we know how easy it is for some people to persuade themselves that a thing is so just because they have said it is.

## CHAPTER III

### RELIGIOUS IDEAS—HOW MYTHS GREW

LET us see how religions grew, and what the stories were like that the priests told.

Imagine primitive man on Salisbury Plain. It is essential for him to know the time for sowing and reaping, so he makes his observations of the sun.

The old man of the tribe stands or squats somewhere while one of his wives, or his ox, or his ass, goes round and round in a circle till the ground is well and clearly worn.

The circle and its centre having been obtained, somebody—probably the priest or priests—observes the sun rising and setting. Stones are erected, and on midsummer day, when the sun rises, a stone is placed where its ray falls.

That is precisely what happened at Stonehenge.

It is easy to see how men living in those far-off days would, in their ignorance, wish to propitiate the Sun, gain his goodwill, and actually go so far as to sacrifice human life for the purpose of winning his smiles ; for in their ignorance they had imagined the sun to be a god.

The minds of the people were impressed by the potent fact that the sun disappeared at night and reappeared in the morning. They also realized that in winter the sun was weak, that he revived in spring, and was in full glory in the summer.

They had all kinds of ceremonials to celebrate these important phases in the sun's history ; and then the soothsayer, the storyteller, the ingenious contriver of

romances, laid himself out to tell in imaginative language what happened to the sun.

"Such a tale," says Rev. Sir G. W. Cox, in *Introduction to Mythology and Folklore*, "is that of Sisypheos, who, as we have seen, is condemned daily to roll a stone to the top of a hill, from which it begins at once to roll down. Now, if we look at the outward world, we see each day a great sphere or ball pushed up to a summit or zenith, and then descending from the height which it had reached. This sphere or ball is the Sun."

That is an example of a story in its simplest form. But stories grow. Primitive man was far from being logical, and he embroidered his stories with all kinds of improbabilities and impossibilities. But the groundwork was some fact in his life.

An idea for a story about the sun would grow at any emotional moment. On the day of some festival, when it was perhaps cloudy and the sun did not appear, the idea would come to some imaginative savage of the sun in distress, of the sun battling against a giant, of the sun rescuing a damsel, of the sun fighting for his life.

Details would go in ; names would be given. The priests would understand ; but the people would accept every word of the story as true.

The name of such tales is legion. Cinderella is one. The story of the dog Gellert is another. William Tell is merely the sun-god, whose rays never missed their mark.

The sorts of tales one would expect to find would be those fitting all kinds of minds—beautiful, fantastic, sensual, tragic, dramatic, simple, quaint. The old tales were amended and embroidered—a natural and inevitable course when the story was repeated orally. It is easy to see how stories would altogether change their dress—while retaining some, if not most,



of their substance—as they were repeated by different tongues and carried by wandering tribes.

When writing had been invented, some of these tales were set down; and succeeding generations re-wrote the tales. They copied part, added fresh portions, and altered others.

As the romancer began "Once upon a time," so the man who wished to impress—particularly if he wished to make people do what he wanted—began his writings with "Thus saith the Lord," or words to that effect. "The word of the Lord came to....." was just as good. What was wanted was a phrase that would awe the people and make them accept what the priest wrote. One gathers that the people now and then saw through the trick, even in those days; for we have many records of no attention being paid to the Lord's words, and tales of Lords getting very angry.

Now and again a wild-haired man, feeling that all was not well with the world, would hurl threatenings at it in the name of the Lord. He would write down his exhortation, and when the skin was worn, and some scribe in the future found it difficult to decipher what was written, a copy—but not a faithful copy—of the old treasured cry would be made. New fancies would be introduced, new notes more appropriate to the hour, new comminations.....

There was no printing in those old days. Skins and papyri wore out and had to be replaced. The tablets got chipped and broken, and were re-written. So it went on from generation to generation. Nothing was stable—not even the "Word of the Lord."

But, we are told, the Bible is an unchanged and unchangeable record; for it is what God, the Creator of the Universe, dictated so that man should know all that it was necessary to know concerning Him.

But other religions say the same thing about their sacred writings.

It may be that man has let his ignorance and his zeal outrun his reason and common sense. Man has made many errors, and few have been so conspicuous as those he has made about gods.

We have now got an idea of the enormous time that the earth has been whirling round the sun—say, two thousand million years. We know there are myriads of other worlds in the universe. We are persuaded that life has developed on this earth of ours from the simple cell to the almost infinite complexities that we see to-day. We are of opinion that man has been on the earth for probably six hundred thousand years. We know that some groups of men have remained savages while others have become cultured. And before the date which Christians placed in the Bible as the commencement of the world, there were races that were highly civilized, particularly if one compares them with the ancient Hebrews.

If we are to think that the Lord of all the Heavens cares for all men alike, we are led to wonder why a small, curious race like the Jews should have been chosen to receive the wonderful story that God had to communicate.....

Of course, if these Jews pretended that what *they* said was the Word of God, then, if we are sensible, we shall discover the truth. We shall not be likely to mistake the word of an ancient Hebrew for the Word of God.

## CHAPTER IV

HOW GENESIS WAS WRITTEN — THE DIFFERENT WRITERS AND EDITORS—CHRISTIAN VIEWS—THE ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION — THE VARYING STORIES—AND WHAT CHRISTIANS THINK OF THEM

THE average Christian thinks he gathers from the Bible that God created the world, including Adam, in six days, and “rested” on the seventh day; that subsequently he created Eve; that he told Adam not to eat of some particular fruit in the Garden of Eden; that the serpent somehow talked to Eve, and persuaded her to eat of it, and that she gave to Adam and he also ate. That constitutes what is called the Fall.

Numbers of Christians do not accept this tale of Adam and Eve; but it is clear that if Christians are at liberty to say they will not accept certain portions of the Bible they have at once destroyed the claim of the Church that it is the Word of God. The Bible is presented to us as a whole; we are told it was written by people who were specially selected by God to write it. It is not inspired “in parts.”

It will interest the reader to know that the book of Genesis got its muddled story of the “Fall” because at least three hands have worked on it. To us that is good evidence that the Book is not inspired. The Word of an Almighty God does not need re-editing or revision. If the first writer was inspired, it would clearly have been impious to have altered what he wrote.

A wrote the first story. B wrote a second story. C blended them. There was revision on revision.

There is scarcely a book in the Bible that has not been what ecclesiastical editors call "redacted." Lest it should be thought some exaggeration has crept into this statement, here is a quotation from the article on Genesis in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, a book written by Christians for Christians: "It is a fortunate circumstance that the author of the Pentateuch has so faithfully preserved the representation and even the language of the earlier works from which he borrows. This renders critical analysis possible, and enables us to recover, at least in part, the older histories from which our Pentateuch was compiled. These older works are primarily two, one of which is commonly called, from its predominating interest in the religious and especially the sacerdotal institutions of Israel, The Priestly History and Law Book (P); the other, from its affinity with the literature of the flourishing period of prophecy, is sometimes named The Prophetic History (J E). The former is marked by such peculiarities of matter, style, and diction that the parts of Genesis which are derived from P are easily separated from J E; and consequently in this part of the analysis there is substantial unanimity among critics. It is not always so easy to distinguish from P the additions and changes which were made up by the author, or rather compiler, of our Hexateuch (Rp) or by late editors."

These Christian writers admit frankly that these early books of the Bible have been revised and edited by more than one hand.

The following quotation is from the article entitled "Historical Literature" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*:—

"The making of history precedes the writing of history, and it is often found that the impulse to write history is first given by some great achievement which exalts the self-consciousness of a people and awakens the sense of the memorable character of

what it has done.....Internal evidence makes it highly probable that the earliest Hebrew historians wrote in the reign of Solomon (middle of the tenth century B.C.), and wrote first of the great events of the preceding half century.

"The beginnings having thus been made, the Israelite writers naturally turned to the earlier history of their people. Their sources, like those of the Greek logographers with whom it is natural to compare them, were poems, such as the Song of Deborah, and briefer lyrics like those in Numbers xxi, of which collections had been made; genealogies often representing clan groupings; tribal and local traditions of diverse kinds, such as furnish the material for most of the book of Judges; the historical traditions of sanctuaries; the sacred legends of holy places, relating theophanies and other revelations, the erection of altar or sacred stone, the origin of peculiar usages—for example, Bethel (Gen. xxviii); laws; myths of native and foreign origin; folklore and fable—in short, anything which seemed to testify of the past.

*"To us the greater part of the material is not in any proper sense historical at all; but for the early Israelite as for the early Greek historian it was otherwise; our distinctions between authentic history, legendary history, pure legend, and myth he made as little as he recognized our distinction of natural and supernatural.....the stories of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Israel and his sons, are told with a wealth of circumstance and a vividness of colour which show that we have entered the realm of pure legend."*

"Transcribers freely added new matter from the same sources on which the original authors had drawn, the traditions of their own locality or sanctuary, variants of historical tradition or legend....."

The italics are not in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

Imagine the history of England being compiled

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from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Arthurian legends, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the Ballad of Chevy Chase. They are all very interesting as stories, but nobody with reasonable intelligence believes them to be true in all their details. Yet they are just as trustworthy as the chronicles, legends, tales, and poems of the Hebrews.

Now let us return to the account of creation as we find it in the book of Genesis.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

On the first day God created light.

On the second day God created Heaven, which had already been created "in the beginning."

On the third day trees and herbs were made.

On the fourth day God made the sun, the moon, and the stars.

The ages of these stars differ from each other by millions upon millions of years.

If the sun was created on the fourth day, how was there any light on the second day, since we get our light from the sun?

And how did the trees and herbs grow on the third day without sun?

On the sixth day God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; *male and female created he them*.

What does that mean? Was this first creature a hermaphrodite? Or, since the word *them* is used, does it mean the Gods (not God) made a man and a woman?

It is just as well to point out here that the translators of the Bible saw that the Hebrew word was Elohim=Gods. But, as it was deemed advisable to teach monotheism, the word was not accurately translated. The Hebrews worshipped many gods.

In the fifth verse of the second chapter it says "there was not a man to till the ground."

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But Adam—a male and female Adam—had already been created ; so there was a man to till the ground.

And in the seventh verse of the second chapter, after the male-and-female Adam had been created, it says : “ And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.”

Was this a second man? Or are we having the first story repeated? And as the first man was a man-woman, what was the second?

These questions are asked to emphasize the muddled way in which this story is told. We know it was muddled, because the writers were ignorant and there were too many of them ; but to suggest it comes direct from the great Creator of the universe is surely putting a great strain on Christian loyalty.

The story goes on to mention two trees which were planted in the Garden of Eden. One was a tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the other was a tree of life.

God put the man he had created in this garden “ to dress it and to keep it.” But the man was warned not to eat of the tree of knowledge, for “ in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Then Eve was created. When Adam saw her he said : “ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.”

That is an odd remark. What did Adam know of fathers and mothers? It suggests the poor storyteller. The person who wrote the tale knew all about fathers and mothers, and forgot for the moment that Adam, never having had a father and being at that time as innocent as a rose—for he had not yet eaten of the tree of knowledge and had only just seen a woman—knew nothing of fatherhood, motherhood, or babies.

Then the serpent appears. In the story he is made to talk, and he persuades Eve to eat of the

forbidden fruit. "Ye shall not surely die," he says to her.

But God is reported to have said in the 17th verse of the second chapter that Adam would die the day he ate of the fruit.

Adam ate of the fruit, *and Adam did not die*. He was made to work hard for the rest of his life.

But we were informed in the 15th verse of the second chapter, before Adam was warned not to eat of the forbidden fruit and before Eve was made, that "the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to *dress it and to keep it*."

Were Adam and Eve turned out of the Garden of Eden because they had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? No. That is the popular notion, but it is not correct.

"And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us to know good and evil. And now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever :

"Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden."

And note that the Lord God—which means the chief of the gods—says "one of us." That shows the writer was certainly not a monotheist, for he makes the Lord God talk of other gods.

To a person of ripe intelligence that account of the creation of the earth and of Adam and Eve is told as a child might tell a tale. It isn't true, in fact; it isn't lucid; it is contradictory, and it is altogether a muddled story.

It is agreed by all competent critics that there are two accounts mixed together, and mixed very badly. It is man's work from beginning to end, and man when he was particularly ignorant, and guessing—as thousands of people in primitive days as well as in these guessed—about the beginning of the world and



of the human race. And this Genesis story is not even one that sprang from a Hebrew's mind. The whole story was borrowed from the Babylonians.

This is what the *Encyclopædia Biblica* says : That " the Hebrew myth, which is still visible in Genesis i, was borrowed at a later time from the Babylonians is the only theory which accounts for the phenomena before us. There are features of the utmost importance to the story which cannot be satisfactorily explained except from the Babylonian point of view." And this : " It has been shown above that there circulated in Judah in the regal period at least two mythic stories of creation, both of which were directly or indirectly of Babylonian origin."

Origen, a Christian Father, offered this terse comment : " What man of sense will agree with the statement that the first, second, and third days, in which the *evening* is named and the *morning*, were without sun, moon, and stars?" And this : " What man is found such an idiot as to suppose that God planted trees in Paradise, in Eden, like a husbandman?"

St. Augustine may be allowed his remark : " There is no way of preserving the literal sense of the first chapter of Genesis without impiety and attributing things to God unworthy of Him."

## CHAPTER V

### THE FLOOD—TOWER OF BABEL—MOSES—THE LORD'S TRIBUTE

FOR reasons of space we do not propose to deal exhaustively with the books of the Old Testament. That there are tales told in them which are not literally true is agreed by intellectual Christian scholars.

There are two stories of the Flood, and they do not agree. The idea, moreover, was borrowed from the Babylonians.

"The question as to the relation of the Babylonian to the Hebrew Deluge-story can now be satisfactorily answered. If, as we believe, the former had its origin from Babylon, and is fundamentally a myth of winter and the sun-god, the Hebrew story must have been borrowed from the Babylonian" (*Encyclopædia Biblica*).

The same authority says of the story of the Tower of Babel :—

"This naïve narrative, which is Yahwistic, probably comes from the same writer as the story of Paradise. Both narratives present the same childlike curiosity about causes, the same strongly anthropomorphic and in some sense polytheistic conception of the divine nature ; both, therefore, have in all ages given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme."

The names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are as familiar as William Tell, and the tales told of them are as true as legends of sun-gods. It is not merely that the accounts in the Bible of these patriarchs are not true ; they are not even nice. Abraham amassed wealth by allowing his wife to be another man's concubine. So

did Isaac. Yet the old writers made these ancient Hebrews friends of God !

“ That these traditions are legends, and not historical records of the time which the family history appears to describe, is certain ” (*Encyclopædia Biblica*).

Old writers wallowed in sensual stories ; and so we have tales which to intelligent beings suggest the outpourings of coarse men rather than the inspiration of God. If you ache for truth, if lies oppress you, if pretence is hateful, if muddled reasoning offends you, many of these stories, related by the priest, make you feel you would do reason wrong if you thought them “ inspired.”

Many men have accepted these tales as true because they were taught to regard them as coming from God ; but every now and again some able Christian stops and says : “ Is it true ? ” Dr. Colenso was such a man. He was a bishop, telling others that these tales in the Bible were the word of God, till a poor Zulu asked him if they were true. And then, for the first time, he seriously set himself to examine the Scriptures.

He published a devastating work showing that the Pentateuch—that is, the first five books of the Bible—contained a mass of errors and absurdities. He showed—to give one instance—that if the account in the Bible was true, then, “ in order that the 51 males of Kohath’s generation might produce 600,000 fighting men in Joshua’s, we must suppose that each man had 46 children (23 of each sex), and each of these 23 sons had 46 children, and so on.”

Naturally Bishop Colenso was persecuted for daring to be truthful ; but there is probably not an intellectual leader in the Church of England to-day who does not agree with almost all Colenso wrote.

Is Moses a myth ?

The following is from Doane's *Bible Myths* (p. 51) :—

"The writer of this story, whoever he may have been, was evidently familiar with the legends related of the sun-god Bacchus, as he has given Moses the credit of performing some of the miracles which were attributed to that god.

"It is related in the hymns of Orpheus that Bacchus had a *rod* with which he performed miracles, and which he could change into a serpent at pleasure. He passed the Red Sea, dry shod, at the head of his army. He divided the waters of the rivers Orontes and Hydaspus by the touch of his rod, and passed through them dry shod. By the same mighty wand he drew water from the rock, and wherever they marched the land flowed with wine, milk, and honey."

Professor Steinthal, in *The Legend of Samson*, says : "Almost all the acts of Moses correspond to those of the sun-gods" (p. 429).

Moses is alleged to have received commandments from God Himself on a mountain, though we cannot be sure which mountain it was, as in Exodus (xix-xx) it says Sinai, and in Deuteronomy (v) it says Horeb, which makes us feel that inspiration is a wrong term to apply to one of those statements.

Man has battled desperately with his lot. He has suffered for ignorance and folly, from famine, earthquake, and tempest ; he has behaved abominably to his fellow man ; but he has made some measure of progress, socially and morally.

We have not the slightest credible evidence that the Almighty wishes us to know more than we can discover, or to live other than the noblest among us can suggest.

With what a sigh of relief would the discovery of a cure for consumption or cancer be hailed ! And the

priest would have us believe that an almighty, all-loving God left us to suffer those awful scourges, and yet was most particular about the decorations of curtains and such-like trivialities.

"The length of one curtain shall be eight and twenty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits; and every one of the curtains shall have one measure.

"The five curtains shall be looped together one to another; and other five curtains shall be coupled one to another.

"And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of one curtain from the selvedge in the coupling."

It is surely more reasonable to think a priest was the author of chapters of that kind, and that he wrote, "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying," rather than to imagine that God dictated all these details to Moses, who did not after all write the Pentateuch in which these details are found.

Here is a phrase that a Christian must read with a certain measure of perturbation:—

"And the persons were sixteen thousand: *of which the Lord's tribute was thirty and two persons.*"

These "persons" were women, "who had not known men," and thirty-two were handed to the Lord!

If it means that the priests took these virgins as their concubines, or merely used them as temple harlots for the purpose of making money like brothel keepers, the phrase, which describes the matter, is not of the happiest, and we cannot believe that God inspired the account or approved of the priestly deed (see Numbers xxxi, 40).

"*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live*" (Ex. xxii, 18). This is one of the most tear-stained phrases ever written. It wrings the heart even to this day. It has caused more unmerited suffering than probably any

other sentence ever framed. The wisest and most learned men believed in witches, because this sentence in the Bible made them believe in them. Neither reason nor experience could wither such a belief. It should stand as a blood-stained warning to all believers.

"If there had been no witches, such a law as this had never been made. The existence of the law given under the direction of the spirit of God proves the existence of the thing," said Dr. Adam Clark.

Sir William Blackstone, in an edition of his commentaries on the Law of England, said that a man "who did not believe in witchcraft was not to be reasoned with."

Reasoned with.....It is tragic. When belief has hold of a man his reason is warped.

Sir William Blackstone is a good example of a man, reasonable in other walks of life, surrendering his common sense in matters of religion. As Dr. Donne said of the virgin birth: "If God Almighty Himself had not said it, I would not have believed it." One sees what fine and noble minds have been turned from the service of man by superstition and fear.

Thousands of people lived tortured lives and died hideous deaths because some heathen—perfectly sincere and perfectly ignorant—concocted the phrase, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and other heathens said it had come from God.

It is impossible to point to a single sentence in the whole of secular literature that has caused so much suffering to mankind as this from the Bible: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

Henry More, the famous philosopher, pronounced those who denounced witchcraft as "buffoons, puffed up with nothing but ignorance, vanity, and stupid infidelity." Casaubon, the learned Dean of Canterbury, agreed. Cudworth, one of the Church's ripest

scholars, stigmatized disbelievers in witchcraft as "atheists." It is only because reason and common sense fought a battle with belief over witchcraft that the Church no longer believes in witchcraft. Sir William Blackstone would not believe in it to-day. He would use his reason to-day. Neither Casaubon nor Cudworth would denounce those who disbelieve in witchcraft to-day. Then why did these intelligent men accept witchcraft? They were believers and not thinkers.

People were panic-stricken through believing in witchcraft. John Wesley said one might as well give up the belief in the Bible as the belief in witchcraft, which was perhaps a truer sentence than he thought.

The torturing of "witches" was appalling. In Scotland it was worse than in England, because the ministers were more fanatical.

Some of the poor creatures accused of witchcraft were mercifully strangled before being burned; but it stamps the tragedy when we have to write "mercifully strangled" over something connected with a preposterous belief.

Witchcraft grew, as Lecky says, "from modes of thought." He adds: "It is impossible to leave the history of witchcraft without reflecting how vast an amount of suffering has, in at least this respect, been removed by the progress of a *rationalistic civilization*."

That surely must make believers pause. Belief brought untold suffering into the world; common sense—thinking—removed it. Religion gave birth to witchcraft, reason triumphed over religion, and the awful spectre was laid. But thousands had died "alone, hated and unpitied," by the hand of ministering priests before reason stepped forward to allay the suffering and stay the bloody hand.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

It is in the Bible to this day.

## CHAPTER VI

DAVID AND GOLIATH—IMAGINATIVE NATURE OF THE STORIES—DAVID AND BATH-SHEBA—DAVID AND THE SHUNAMITE—THE NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE—DAVID'S DEATH-BED

THE story of the slaying of Goliath by David has been the subject of many pictures and more sermons. Every child believes it.

David is one of the great heroes of Jewry, and, though we are content to see him as a creature of his time, yet those who have written of him have done so in a way that makes it difficult for us to accept their writings as inspired.

First, we will quote from the article in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, written, as we have already said, by Christians for Christians :—

“The chronology of the life of David is most uncertain.....The early history also of David is in many respects uncertain. It intertwines to a great extent with the still obscurer record of his predecessor (Saul) ; and keen criticism is necessary to arrive at the kernel of the fact, which there undoubtedly is, in the legends that have come down to us.....Nor is the statement that the shepherd-lad slew Goliath the Philistine consistent with the plain and thoroughly credible because unlegendary tradition given elsewhere that the slayer of Goliath was Elhanan, and the period of his exploit not in Saul's but in David's reign.”

That is an admission of great value, because it lets us see the dishonesty of those who translated the Bible and of those who say it is the inspired Word of



God. If we look at II Samuel xxi, 19, we find this verse :—

“And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew *the brother* of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.”

If what has been done there were done in these days, a cry of indignation would go up. The translators deliberately inserted the words, which are not in the original, “*the brother of.*”

David had had attributed to him many glorious deeds, including the slaying of Goliath. The translators could not very well leave out this verse, which told the truth, and so they made it lie.

To us it is a revelation that the translators of the Bible knew they were handling purely human material, otherwise they would not have dared to take such liberties with it.

The Christian editors of the *Encyclopædia Biblica* have no doubt who killed Goliath ; they frankly say it was Elhanan, and not David.

We cull the following from the article on David in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, which will help us to appreciate at its real value what is meant by “inspiration”:—  
 “The account of Samuel’s solemn consecration of David as King in I Samuel xvi, 1–13, has evidently *not a historical* but a religious motive.....It is *equally uncertain* whether the story in xix, 11–17, has any claim to represent the closing scene in David’s life at Gibeah.....We can hardly venture to accept this account as correct.....If we ask *how much* of the details of these hairbreadth escapes is *historical*, the reply must be *equally disappointing* to literalists.....  
*We are dealing, not with an original narrative, but with a panegyric made up from various sources, containing strong traces of editorial work.....It is very probable that the most fascinating part of the story was*

*imagined by the editor.....Nor can any of the psalms in the Psalter be ascribed with any probability to David."* (The italics are ours.)

To us, who take the view that the Bible is the work of men's hands, this kind of criticism, coming from learned Christians, is reassuring.

Now let us see of what stuff David was made, for we are told he was a man after God's own heart.

If the Bible were inspired, we could have no better guide to conduct than to see what David did, and endeavour to do likewise. But if, as we believe, the Bible is the work of man, and these early portions were written by ignorant, uncouth, zealous, imaginative men, and not inspired by God at all, we should probably feel positively ashamed to do the things that David did, and feel that he who described David as being "after God's own heart" was describing very wrongly, and that no one should take notice of what he said.

David had as wives Michal, Saul's daughter, and Ahinoam of Jezreel. But one day he saw Bath-Sheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, washing herself. That she was Uriah's wife was nothing to David, who promptly possessed her. "She conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child."

David sent for Uriah to come back from fighting, so that the husband should go to his wife and David's cuckoldry be undiscovered. But Uriah refused to go in unto his wife, so when Uriah went back to the army to fight David's battles David sent with him a letter to Joab.

"And he wrote in the letter saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die."

The believer has much food for contemplation in that story.

"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to

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say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (II Samuel xxiv, 1).

"So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men" (verse 15).

Seventy thousand people died of pestilence because David numbered the people—so the Bible says. And the Bible also says that David numbered the people because God made him do it!

Opposing the theory that the Bible is a human book from the first page to the last, containing some very foolish things, the priests say it is the infallible Word of God. We feel we are not speaking too strongly in saying that nobody, reading the twenty-fourth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, could possibly agree with the priests unless he trampled on common sense.

The extraordinary thing is that in the Book of Chronicles it says: "*And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.*"

Both these versions cannot be true. No theory of inspiration can make these two versions correct.

Suppose we imagine these old books as the word of men, and think of an old writer trying to connect some pestilence with a cause; for these old writers wished to drag God into everything. He remembers that the pestilence happened after David numbered the people, and so in his ignorance attributes it to God. It is logic enough for him. He didn't think that people thousands of years afterwards would say he wrote under the inspiration of God.

Now imagine another writer learning from some other people that an evil spirit exists: he drags in the evil one in his account, and it reads a little less non-sensical. But, even as it stands, nobody preserving his reasonableness can understand why 70,000 innocent people should be killed in a pestilence because

the devil is alleged to have encouraged David to number the people. It is obvious we have in that story notions of a bygone age, when incidents and ideas had little relation to truth.

And on his death-bed David spoke in this wise to his son Solomon :—

“And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim : but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death by the sword.

“Now therefore hold him not guiltless ; for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him ; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood ” (I Kings ii, 8, 9).

David, this man after God's own heart, has come to the end of life's fretful fever and lies upon his death-bed. The passions of this world will soon be no more to him. He knows he is passing hence. Men of all ages, in all climes, who have lived tempestuous lives, in which anger and hate have had their share, have at the last seen the futility of these blood-red emotions and forgiven their bitterest enemies in the grand clemency of death. But David, even at the last, plays foul. He had given his word to spare Shimei, so he craftily tells his son to murder him !

This is egregiously Oriental. The Oriental loves craft and appreciates revenge. He would gloat over the stab from the dark that would pierce the unsuspecting Shimei. It is the kind of thing that makes man see what a poor thing man has been ; for it is human. To-day such an incident would engulf a man in shame. We, who read the Bible as man's work, note passages like this with a human interest ; they are intelligible, just as other human weaknesses

are intelligible. But if we attempt to believe the priests and think David was a man "after God's own heart," and that God "inspired" a writer to set down such incidents as this for our learning, we have to put on one side all reasonableness. The priests' theory has neither body nor significance. It lacks all grace and winningness.

David may have been a hero to his people, but in certain occasions of his life he behaved like a man of his age. There have, we hope, been many better men on the earth. We feel sure no believer could possibly agree, after reading the life of David, that a true description of him is "a man after God's own heart."

We do not want to weary the reader by repetitions. Because the Bible has been handled and treated as the Word of God, people have let their judgment fail in respect of it. As literature, we could make half a dozen anthologies that would surpass it for beauty and truth. It has beauties; but it has also many coverable spots.

We shall deal with the way it was put together; but we should like to impress upon the reader the value of a study of the prophets. These wild, fervent men are interesting, even if they are occasionally unintelligible—a fault that naturally could not be alleged against God; for if he thought it worth while "inspiring" any message for mankind, it would not be inspired in such a way that nobody would be able to make head or tail of it.

## CHAPTER VII

THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS—THE SONG OF DEBORAH  
—HOW BOOKS ACCUMULATED—THE PRIESTLY  
WRITERS AND EDITORS—CONTRARY VERSIONS—  
WHY THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS ADOPTED

It will be convenient now if we see how the books that make the Old Testament were gathered together.

There were religious writings in India before the Hebrews could read. In Egypt and Babylon civilizations and religions flourished when the Hebrews were a mere handful of lean wanderers. Hammurabi, who ruled in Babylon in 2250 B.C., composed a code of laws which inspired the Hebrews over a thousand years later! Babylon was to the Hebrews what a civilized European country is to certain tribes in Africa to-day. Five hundred years hence those African tribes may lead the world, though it is to be hoped they won't borrow European superstitions or creeds.

The Hebrews in their early days were not a rich, powerful, or distinguished people. They seem to have had a particular faculty for getting into trouble, as well as pretending they were God's chosen people. They were frequently defeated and carried into captivity, and it was after one of their periods of captivity that Cyrus is said to have decided to send the Jews to Jerusalem to build "the house of the Lord God of Israel."

At that time there was no such thing as a Bible. Priests make Bibles out of the best materials they can lay their hands on, and then call them God's Word. In the beginning of worship all that was gone through

was a ceremonial. Then probably a song was sung or a tale told, as much for interest as for enlightenment.

It is suggested that the first part of the Bible to be written was the Song of Deborah and Barak. It goes with a superb lilt :—

“The Kings came and fought, then fought the Kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo : they took no gain of money.

“They fought from heaven : the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

“The river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

“Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones.”

It is characteristically brutal as it goes on :—

“She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman’s hammer ; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.”

Jael would not be held in such high esteem to-day ; but among a people where treachery was accounted clever, and victory everything, Jael became a fine heroine. And as they sit under the sheltering palms, round the well, you can hear the old soothsayer or teller of tales droning it out :—

“Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.....”

What happened among these Hebrews was that they accumulated songs like this about Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, other tales, and naturally a group of laws. These songs, tales, and laws were inspired by incidents in their own history and incidents in the history of other people. There was no question at first of these songs and tales being part of a “bible” ; they were composed as songs and tales are composed

to-day, with probably just about the same amount of plagiarism in them.

The Assyrians and Babylonians wrote on clay which was afterwards baked. These clay tablets have been found in great quantities. The Hebrews wrote for the most part on skins. Tales of national greatness, being always flattering and frequently untrue, are generally a fountain of great pleasure. Every country has got a history it does not deserve. Most countries can boast of other nations' failings. Two thousand five hundred years ago they had fewer scruples than we have to-day even in the boasting line.

Let us imagine A writes a song setting forth the glorious deed of somebody. The skin on which the tale is written wears out. B, who re-copies it, drags in the name of his native village. C, the third copyist, is a stern, uncompromising priest, and claps into it commandments, blessings, and curses, adding, perhaps, "Thus saith the Lord," or something of that kind.

If the Bible is read carefully, it will be seen to consist of songs, laws, objurgations by priests, and tales, all of them of a very human nature.

Suppose we transfer what the Jews did to ourselves.

Our early literature is, say, *Beowulf*, *Widsith*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *Guy of Warwick*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. These pieces are read and copied. The priests are the copyists. Let us see how they do it:—

"When Archbishop Parker edited Asser's *Life of Alfred* (1574) he did not hesitate to incorporate into it passages from the so-called Annals of Asser. These annals were no doubt believed to have proceeded from the same author; Parker's amalgamation of materials thus seemingly enabled the original writer to enrich his story out of his own collections.



But a little examination discloses the fact that the Annals were compiled only towards the end of the twelfth century, and contained extracts from many sources, including a life of St. Edmund by Abbo, who wrote at least four score years after Asser's death.....The Saxon chronicle first emerges into light under Alfred's direction. It is founded originally on the Bishop's Roll in Winchester, a series of meagre and irregular annals in the Latin tongue, concerned chiefly with local events from the days of the preaching of Birinus. It is enlarged under the influence of Swithun; it receives fresh entries describing the coming of the fathers; it is brought into relation with the national history. Then Alfred takes it up—"and so forth (*The Composition of the Hexateuch*, by J. Estlin Carpenter and George Harford).

Sir Thomas Hardy (*Descriptive Catalogue of Material III*, p. xi) says: "Monastic chronicles were seldom the production of a single hand, as in the case of Malmesbury and Beda. They grew up from period to period; each age added fresh material, and every house in which they were copied supplied fresh local information, until the tributary streams often grew more important than the original current." This is from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 1,441: "This is a good example of the method of the author, who always endeavours to connect the legislation with some occasion or circumstance in the history, so that in its primitive form and intention P was not a 'Priest's Code,' but a history of the origins of the sacred institutions of Israel."

It is easy to follow these copyists, who were better styled editors or compilers. They took old writings and altered them to suit their own wishes and beliefs. And somebody followed them, altering and adding and subtracting with equal license.

It has happened among all people.

It happened among the Jews.

A simple tale became something wonderful in the hands of these pen-and-skin worthies. Think of what was probably a simple trek somewhere—perhaps out of Egypt—becoming the story of the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea!

In the Bible we trace the hand of some of these writers and editors. One referred to God as Yahveh (Jehovah); another referred to Elohim. Then there is the Deuteronomist writer, and also the sub-editing priest who let his opinions be known whenever he could work on a skin.

These main streams of writers and correctors are recognized by all intelligent Bible critics—outside the Roman Catholic Church.

“The hypothesis which best seems to suit the facts is that the Pentateuch has been compiled out of three main sources—(1) a book of priestly law preceded by a short narrative introduction cast chiefly into genealogical form, P; (2) a book of national history, itself composite, deeply marked by prophetic ideas, wrought out of two strands respectively designated J and E; and (3) the Deuteronomic code D” (Carpenter and Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch*).

It is not pretended that every little Christian community has accepted these ideas, for we know that in places like Dayton (U.S.A.) some ideas take long to penetrate; but the learned Christian writers who are responsible for the *Encyclopædia Biblica* accept these P D and J E versions (P = Priest, D = Deuteronomist, J = Jahveh, E = Elohim).

Read the first chapter of Genesis and the first three verses of chapter ii. There the word used for “gods” is Elohim, and it occurs thirty-five times; Yahveh (Jehovah) is not mentioned. Then at verse 4 some one has spatchcocked the Yahveh version, so that

the story is muddled. And as Elohim was used at one time and Jahveh at another, plain honest men have come to the conclusion that different hands have been at work, and that they can be traced.

This is from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 1,442 : "It is clear also that the author who united J and E (R.je) not only fused his source much more completely than the last redactor of the Hexateuch (R.p.), but also otherwise treated his material with a freer hand. ....In Exodus, moreover, the work of the later editors of the Deuteronomistic school is more frequently to be recognized or suspected."

The following is from an address delivered by the Rev. T. Theodore Knight, and republished under the title *Rational Religion* : "For the Deity was popularly known to the Hebrews under two titles, 'Jehovah' and 'Elohim,' the former being more especially the name of the God of Revelation. And while the author of the one narrative employed the term 'Jehovah' for God, 'Elohim' was the favourite title of the other. The two documents are, therefore, generally designated by the letters 'J' and 'E.' They were probably composed by members of the schools of the Prophets, which began to flourish after the establishment of the Hebrew Monarchy. J may have been written in the ninth century, and is probably the earlier of the pair.....Afterwards, at some date between the times of Isaiah and Jeremiah, this pair of prophetic documents was fused into a composite product, now known as J E, which is one of the main elements of the present book." Then "P" enters on the scene, P standing for priest : "Frequent and lengthy passages from J E were inserted by the final redactor into the sacerdotal 'Grundschrift.' By a method which has been described as that of 'an editor with paste and scissors'—a method of selective incorporation—he produced at last the Hebrew text

which now stands at the opening of the Jewish Scriptures." (He is here referring to the contradictory accounts of the creation in Genesis.)

Now and again some Roman Catholic priest buckles his courage about him and tries to get at the truth. Dr. Alexander Geddes, a Roman Catholic priest, who edited a translation of the Scriptures with notes, and therefore studied them, wrote this in vol. i, p. 19: "But, although I am inclined to believe that the Pentateuch was reduced into its present form in the reign of Solomon, I am fully persuaded that it was compiled from ancient documents, some of which were coeval with Moses, and some even anterior to Moses. Whether all these were written records or many of them only oral traditions it would be rash to determine. It is my opinion that the Hebrews had no written documents before the days of Moses, and that all their history prior to that period is derived from monumental indexes or traditional tales. Some remarkable tree under which a patriarch had rested; some pillar which he had erected; some heap which he had raised; some ford which he had crossed; some spot where he had encamped; some field which he had purchased; the tomb in which he had been laid—all these served as so many links to hand his story down to posterity, and corroborated the oral testimony transmitted from generation to generation in simple narratives or rustic songs. That the marvellous would sometimes creep into these we can easily perceive; but still the essence, or at least the skeleton, of history was preserved."

That was written over a hundred years ago. Dr. Geddes was brave for his day. He was one of the first in the critical field. When he read seriously he could not accept all the old tales he had been taught. Truth lured him as it lures all really good men. "*The marvellous would sometimes creep in.*" Quite so.

Dr. Colenso, in Part II of his work on *The Pentateuch*, says (par. 477) : "That, however, the later Deuteronomist had no very strong sense of the unspeakable sacredness of the earlier document is sufficiently plain by the liberties he has taken with its contents, by altering several of its expressions, and, in particular, modifying remarkably the Fourth Commandment. One would have thought that any one—even Moses himself—while repeating words believed to be ineffably holy, which had not only been uttered in the ears of all Israel by Jehovah Himself, but, according to the story, written down by the Finger of God twice over on the Tables of stone, would not have varied by a single word or letter from the Divine original.

"Yet how stands the case in this respect? In the Hebrew there are several minor discrepancies, such as changes or additions of words, some of which may be observed in the English translation. But the latter part of the Fourth Commandment is completely altered, and a totally different reason is assigned, in the passage of Deuteronomy, for sanctifying the Sabbath, from that laid down in the book of Exodus, and, what is still more remarkable, without any reference to the latter reason as even existing."

The two passages in question are as follows :—

From Exodus xx, 8–11 :—

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of Jehovah thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

*"For in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: WHEREFORE Jehovah blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it."*

From Deuteronomy v, 12-15 :—

“Keep the Sabbath Day to sanctify it, as Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of Jehovah thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates : that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

*“And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm ; THEREFORE Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath Day.”*

“Each writer distinctly *professes* to give the identical words *which were spoken by Jehovah Himself at the very same point of time.*”

The serious, intelligent Protestant who comes across passages like these does not know what to think. The Roman Catholic is not allowed to think. But people who use their common sense and take no notice of the foolish notions of priests are not troubled. These books are men's books. We are given a passage that purports to be a commandment of God. But later some priest alters it. The priests say we are to believe both, because they are in the Bible, and all the Bible is inspired by God.

It might be interesting to show how the priestly writer could touch up—“with his own hand.”

Imagine the priest copying an old skin, as he who wrote chronicles might have copied “Kings.” As he waded through it he would insert phrases that would redound (as he would think) to the honour of his own order. Here are two quotations (see *Bishop Colenso*, vol. vii, p. 334) :—

*From II Kings xi (verse 5,  
etc.)*

This is the thing that ye shall do. The third of you, those coming-in on the Sabbath, shall keep the guard of the King's house, at the entrance, and the third at the side-gate, and the third at the gate behind the runners (i.e. guard), and ye shall keep the guard of the house with keeping-off. And the two divisions among you, all that go out on the Sabbath, shall keep the guard of the House of Jahveh about the King. And ye shall compass the King about, each with his weapons in his hand, and he that cometh-in into the lines shall be put-to-death; and be ye with the King at his going-out and at his coming-in.

*How the ingenious Levite copied  
that passage (II Chronicles  
xxiii).*

This is the thing that ye shall do. The third of you, those coming-in on the Sabbath, of the Priests and of the Levites, (shall be) gate keepers of the thresholds and the third at the King's house, and the third at the gate of the foundation, and all the people at the courts of the House of Jahveh. And there shall none come-in to the House of Jahveh but the Priests and those ministering of the Levites; they shall come-in for they are holy, and all the people shall keep the guard of Jahveh. And the Levites shall compass the King about, each with his weapons in his hand; and he that cometh-in unto the House shall be put-to-death; and be ye with the King at his coming-in and at his going-out.

Out go the people, the non-priests, the laymen, and in come the priestly order, the Levites! Priests have naturally been inclined to that kind of thing, but it scarcely goes to show that the Bible was written by the Holy Ghost.

One sees that Jewish literature grew as other literatures have grown. Their literature was varied as was other peoples'.

The law contained a great number of foolish things, but it probably suited the people at that time, just as laws made to-day are accepted by the mass of the people in America, Russia, France, Turkey, and Morocco.

To the reading of the Law there was probably added a story that told of how God had helped the children of Israel in days gone by.

The writings of the prophets, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, etc., would soon be dragged in.

In the time of Christ the Jews had a mass of literature ; but they had no actual Bible. These rolls were read and explained.

Imagine the ancient Britons worshipping after their fashion all sorts of gods, and gradually accumulating a literature tinged at times with religious fervour, but showing all the time the hand of man in it—what would a reasonable man say if he were told that these Anglo-Saxon chronicles, et cetera, were inspired by an Almighty God? He would surely want to know what evidence there was for such a statement, and next he would look for the divine touch in the works themselves. If he found that so-called inspired mass of literature was of such a nature that a very great deal of it would be thrown away to-day because of its filthiness, its inaccuracy, its brutality, and its futility, he would come to the conclusion that the men who said such a literature had been dictated by God or inspired by God were not telling the truth, and were saying something that was shameful.

Everything goes to show that the Hebrew literature was produced like other literatures. Hebrews were not the first to tell tales. When they did come to write "for our learning," they borrowed from other people.

The only reason why anything more than a literary attention is paid to these old Jewish writings is because Jesus was a Jew.

When Christianity was founded—a difficult date to fix—there was no such thing as a Bible. The old Brahmins and Buddhists had Holy Scriptures ; the Egyptians had a *Book of the Dead* and the *Sayings of Khuenaten* ; the Persians had the *Zend-Avesta* ; the



Chinese had sacred books. They were all as sacred as the Jewish books. Priests made them sacred. Priests generally re-wrote and edited them, even if they had not originally imagined them. There is nothing to guide the man of common sense save knowledge and reason. Each priest swears his religion and his scriptures are true. But they cannot all be true. If the first are true, then the Jews are past further consideration, for they were not the first in the field with sacred writings.

We talk of classical writers. Those are considered classics who have given such a message that not only their own but subsequent generations appraise them. Holy scriptures are merely Jewish classics. But whereas there is a fair field and no favour for pure literature, holy scriptures are favoured from the start. Read, say, the Prophet Haggai. Haggai is not reprinted and reprinted because of any real merit in Haggai. Haggai has no message for us to-day, however thrilling it might have been in the day when it was delivered. There have been written thousands of more dignified, more elevating, more beautiful passages than the two chapters that Haggai wrote, but they have not been called holy or inspired of God. Haggai certainly talks like a good labour leader in the sixth verse of chapter i, but the rest might as well be silence.

We have had to accept these old writings of the Jews as holy and inspired because the priests said so, and for no other reason whatever. There is no other reason. As we have already seen, a man using his common sense would be compelled to deny that most of these books in the Old Testament are inspired of God, because they contain stupidities and errors such as no God could inspire. But because the Jews accumulated these writings, the subsequent adopters of Christianity, realizing that Jesus was a Jew and had

been a professing Jew, promptly annexed these tales of fancy and of fear, of muddled, sensual, silly things, and said they must be accepted with the teaching of Jesus. And in the course of time people *had* to believe these old Jewish writings were the Word of God !

## CHAPTER VIII

### PHALLICISM

It will probably be easier for the reader to grasp the import of many things mentioned in the Bible if the religion of the Hebrews is now dealt with.

The view that the Jews were the race who were monotheistic in the midst of polytheistic people, and so preserved the true religion to the world, is false. They took the religions of other peoples with whom they came in contact.

"In the lapse of ages," says Dr. Oort in *The Worship of Baalim in Israel*, "the religion of Israel was unspeakably changed." There is no doubt that the Hebrews were phallic and sun worshippers.

If we go back to those early days in man's development and see his wonder at the things that happen, we know that he was impressed with the sun and the earth and all they meant to him. He saw things grow; he noted that the sun shone, rain fell, and the earth produced. He was also struck with his own fertility. The animal world brought forth and multiplied as the earth did.

He understood concrete things; he realized the difference between a good and a bad harvest. He endowed the Sun, the Rain, and the Earth with power, with personality, with godhood. If there was a bad harvest, he thought the gods were displeased. They must be appeased; he would sacrifice to them something that was dear to him. He wished to do these great spirits, these gods, homage and keep their favour.

So he built something somewhere—a rude stone, a carved pillar, an altar, a shrine.....

He evolved a kind of ceremony or play. He thought of what his god did, and he imitated it. The god appeared to die; very well, he would act something like that. And he would rise again in glory, like the sun did in the morning. His play would be birth, trouble, death, and a coming to life again.

Then a tale was invented that described more or less what the ritual—the play that he acted—was about.

In that way myths grew. The myth was the story of the ritual or play.

Human beings realized that animals and they themselves were fruitful and multiplied. There was something creative about them; and their simple, non-moral minds worshipped human fertility as they worshipped vegetable fertility. They were not able to take the thing as a simple fact; they had to make a mystery of it—a religion.

“The first doctrine to be taught men would have relation to their being. The existence of a creator could be illustrated by a potter at the wheel. But there was a much more expressive form familiar to them, indicative of cause and effect in the production of births in the tribe or in nature. In this way the *phallus* became the exponent of creative power; and, though to our eyes vulgar and indecent, bore no improper meaning to the simple ancient worshipper” (Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief*, p. 257).

Phallic worship has flourished in Egypt, India, Syria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany, Scandinavia, among the Gauls, the Mexicans, the Peruvians, and elsewhere.

These ancient people saw as children *see*. They drew crudely; so long as they approximated to what they wished to express, they were content. An upright stone was symbolically clear to them. Sometimes

they were more realistic and put two smaller stones beside it.

They used symbols for their religion, and so were able to give their gods phallic signs as names and write stories about them. As the rituals developed, so the stories grew.

Herodotus, describing a festival in Egypt, says : "The festival is celebrated almost exactly as Bacchic festivals in Greece. They also use, instead of phalli, another invention consisting of images a cubit high, pulled by strings, which the women carry round to the villages.....A piper goes in front, and the women follow, singing hymns in honour of Bacchus."

The worshippers of Siva wear on their left arm a bracelet containing an image of the lingam and yoni.

"On the Lower Congo, as far as Stanley Pool, phallic worship in various forms prevails. It is not associated with any rites that might be called particularly obscene ; and on the coast, where manners and morals are particularly corrupt, the phallus cult is no longer met with. In the forests between Manyanga and Stanley Pool it is not rare to come upon a little rustic temple, made of palm-fronds and poles, within which male and female figures, nearly or quite life-size, may be seen, with disproportionate genital organs, the figures being intended to represent the male and female principle. Around these carved and painted statues are many offerings of plates, knives, and cloth ; and frequently also the phallic symbol may be seen dangling from the rafters. There is not the slightest suspicion of obscenity in all this, and any one qualifying this worship of the generative power as obscene does so hastily and ignorantly. It is a solemn mystery to the Congo native, a force but dimly understood, and, like all mysterious natural manifestations, it is a power that must be propitiated and

persuaded to his good" (*The River Congo*, by H. H. Johnstone, p. 405).

There was nothing immoral or phallician to genuine phallic worshippers. They believed just as Christians believe. That they could be alive to the sensual side is shown in India, where the priest goes through the ceremony naked, surrounded by phallic symbols, and behaves as a man to whom all things are pure. In case of default he is promptly stoned.

But we must remember that priests have been men like the rest of us. Some of them have been imaginative, some clear-sighted, some gross and sensual. All have been credulous, and most have loved—as they do to-day—mysteries.

The priestly mind moves in a mysterious way. It likes to have something hidden, something secret of which it holds the key. When the ancient priests wrote of religion they wrote as with a priestly cypher. Moreover, the last writer wiped out or altered the tenour of the things he disagreed with in the previous one.

How were they to write of this phallic god? They have so written of their "mysteries" that most Christians to this day fail to see the phallic significance of the ark and its contents. Symbolism was everything to the old priest. He had to reproduce, repeat, re-enact, what the god did or was. That explains Bacchic orgies and the myths and rituals relating to sun worship.

The priests naturally found a way of writing so that they would be understood by the initiated and not by the uninitiated. Jonah, for instance, is a myth of the sun-god. The priests would understand it because of certain signs in the narrative; the name Jonah would be enough for them. And the people would accept it as a simple story. One can see that, with the passing of time and the fading of mystery,

the story has had to stand as something holy in an age that no longer sees the holiness. Samson is a figure of romance to-day; he was a god. His name proclaimed him a god when he was created. His name excites no holy emotion to-day.

In writing one can see that characters could be formed to represent the male and female generating organs. IO would stand for male and female. IV would do as well as IO. The god Yahveh, whom we translate Yehovah, was written IHVH. But the H's were merely aspirates.

In all probability the names in the Bible would unlock much for us if we could understand them. We know that many names are phallic; that is, their Hebrew characters suggested what the priest would convey, and that was his mystery. *The tale was merely additional.*

"Numerous writers have maintained that the ankh, or T (tau), as the sign of life, was the phallus, and the crux ansata, T̄, the combined male and female organs; just as sistrum or guitar of Egypt and the delta, Δ (lands on which gods played and produced all life), represented Isis or 'woman'" (Westropp, *Primitive Symbolism*, p. 22).

The Hebrews, instead of being a people who were faithful to Jehovah or to Elohim, were tinged with phallicism. We have been told that the Hebrews kept the faith pure amid a world of idolaters. All faiths have changed, because men have changed. Let us see whether we can see signs of phallicism among the ancient Hebrews.

The verse in the Bible which says "male and female created he them" is not a proper translation. The old writer called a spade a spade, but the Rabbis apparently thought God's inspired words would not suit delicate ears, and so they changed the offending words to "civil" ones. To many people that verse

has a phallic note. Not merely that, but the idea of generation in the chapter, which is borrowed from the Babylonians, who were phallic, maintains it. "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" is our polite version. The original is more after this style: "The mother of the gods brooded over the fertile abyss and brought forth life," which is more phallic than monotheistic.

The story of the fall is obviously phallic. Even priests will admit that what is meant to be conveyed is a story of sex. "Knowledge" in the Bible means sexual intercourse. "And he knew his wife and she conceived." The serpent is a phallic symbol. "That the serpent was the Phallus is proved by the Bible itself. The Hebrew word used for 'serpent' is Nachash, which is everywhere else translated in the Bible in a phallic sense, as in Ezekiel xvi, 36, where it is rendered 'filthiness' in the sense of exposure, like the 'having thy Boseth naked' of Micah" (J. B. Hannay, *Christianity: The Sources of its Teaching and Symbolism*).

The Egyptians mixed phallicism with their sun worship as others did. The ark was a feminine symbol there, and it is interesting to consider why Moses made an ark and put in it a rod and two stones. As phallic symbols these would convey much. Naturally some people have tried to suggest that the two stones were the two tables of stone which Moses is said to have brought down from Sinai or Horeb; the priest, following the Bible closely, being unable to tell us even unto this day which was the favoured mountain. But, while it would be natural to copy other phallic worshippers like the Egyptians and make phallic symbols, there was nothing either symbolical or sensible in putting plain commandments in an ark.

"The Eduth, the Shechina, the Tsur, and the



Yahveh were identical : simply different names for the same thing—the phallus. They occupied the female ark, with which they formed the double-sexed life symbol.....The Hebrew religion had thus a purely phallic basis, as was to be expected from a ritual and symbolism derived from two extremely phallic nations, Babylon and Egypt” (J. B. Hannay, *Christianity*, p. 254).

One understands why the priests should have been so anxious to prevent people looking into the ark. But if the ark represented the real creator of the universe in some way or other, why this taut secrecy? According to the Christian, God is Love. God wishes all mankind to know him and learn all about him. Yet the priests said : “If you dare to peep in the Ark of the Eduth or testes or stones or testimony, you will die the death.” As a threat it might have worked ; but it leads us to think that the ark was phallic, and that the priests wished to stop the people from being curious and to fill them with ignorant awe.

The *Encyclopædia Biblica* says : “The ark contained two sacred stones (or one). This view, no doubt, implies a survival of fetishism ; but there are traces enough of fetishism elsewhere in Hebrew antiquity to justify it. The stones must have been ancient in the extreme. They (or it) had originally no association with Yahwe (Jehovah) ; they represented the stage when mysterious personality and power were attached to lifeless matter.”

In other words, these Christian writers tell us frankly that these stones were of an old religion and had nothing to do with Jehovah, and therefore were not the tables of stone on which the commandments were written. That they were phallic symbols seems to be the most reasonable suggestion.

This is in Isaiah lvii, 7-8, as we read it to-day :

"Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed : even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.

"Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance : for thou hast discovered thyself to another than me and art gone up ; thou hast enlarged thy bed and made thee a covenant with them ; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it."

What does the believer make of those verses ?

This is a more literal translation of versè 8 : "And behind the door and the post thou hast placed thy sexual altar, and apart from me thou hast uncovered and erected, thou hast enlarged thy bed, and obtained a connection with them ; thou hast loved their bed, thou hast beheld the phallus."

As spoken by one indulging in phallic worship they are intelligible.

Stones or rocks were phallic memorials. "When Jacob took the stone (Gen. xxviii, 18-19) on which he slept on his way from Beersheba to Haran and set it up on end for a pillar, and poured oil on top of it and called it 'Bethel, the House of God,' he performed a distinct act of phallic worship, such as may still be witnessed every day, at every turn, in India" (Sir George Birdwood, *Journal Royal Society of Arts*, December 30, 1910).

Rocks were phallic symbols.

General Forlong, in *Rivers of Life* (p. 103), says : "It should not be, but I fear it is, necessary to explain to mere English readers of the Old Testament that the *Stone or Rock—Tsur*—was the real old God of all Arabs, Jews, and Phœnicians, and this would be clear to Christians were the Jewish writings translated according to the first ideas of the people, and *Rock* used, as it ought to be, instead of 'God,' 'Theos,' 'Lord,' etc., being written where *Tsur* occurs."

Dr. Colenso, in the Appendix to Dr. Oort's book, gives a list of quotations to show that "Rock" was

used in Israel as a name for the Deity. Among them are : "The Rock who begat thee" (Deut. xxxii, 18); "For their Rock is not as our Rock" (v. 31); "And he shall say, Where is their Elohim, their Rock in whom they trusted" (v. 37); "There is no Rock like our Elohim" (I Sam. ii, 2 ; compare II Sam. xxii, 32, Ps. xviii, 31).

Baal was phallic. Baal-Peor is the androgynous god, Baal meaning "erect" and Peor "open." And there is no doubt that the Hebrews were followers of Baal. Yahveh or Jehovah or IHVH says in Hosea ii, 16 : "Thou shalt call me Ishi [my husband], and shalt call me no more Baali." "And they made them molten images, even two calves [?], and made an Asherah, and worshipped all the host of heaven and served the Baal" (II Kings xvii, 16).

"For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah : and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to Bosheth, altars to burn incense unto Baal" (Jeremiah xi, 13).

"They went to Baal-Peor and consecrated themselves to Bosheth and became abominable like that they loved" (Hosea ix, 10).

Elijah, aided by Jehovah, is reported to have dealt rather drastically with the prophets of Baal ; but that account probably came from the pen of a scribe who did not favour Baal, and wished to cover the religion with contumely. It was on a par with the Mosaic miracles. And with Dr. Colenso we ask, What happened to the four hundred prophets of the Asherah ? These prophets of Asherah are regarded as faithful followers of Jehovah, and Asherah was phallic !

Dr. Colenso, in a note to Dr. Oort's work, has this : "It is not at all inexplicable if, in the eyes of the people, JHVH was the same as the Baal." (He refers to the saving of the prophets of Asherah.) "And that this was the case we gather from the fact that

both Saul and David had sons whose names were compounded with Baal—viz., Eshbaal, Baalyadah, as well as others whose names were compounded with JHVH, as Jonathan, Adonijah, Shephatiah. Accordingly, at Byblus, Adonis had a famous temple in common with the goddess *Baaltis*."

Any one reading the Bible carefully will be struck by the fact that the Hebrews are continually being accused of worshipping false gods and running after strange ones. The fact was, they picked up new religions or new phases of old ones as easily as they went into captivity. When their kings married princesses like Jezebel, who were zealous for their own cult, they adopted that cult.

The beliefs of the time were not monotheistic at all ; they were polytheistic and tolerant—till later. One god was chief, but there were many gods. Hence JHVH and Baal dwelling together in unity.

"The Hebraic phallus was, during nine hundred years, the rival of the Victorious Jehovah" (Larousse, *Grande Dictionnaire Universelle*).

What is one to say of translators who mislead? We know that ancient rabbis toned down words ; we know also that modern translators have taken liberties with the texts of the scriptures ; but if the scriptures are the inspired Word of God, the liberties have been unreligious.

Take the word "Asherah," which has been translated "grove."

It meant a pillar or post. and was usually erected near Baal's altar. It was a phallic symbol, and the Israelites, indulging in phallic worship, did such things as phallic worshippers do. Baal and Asherah, having been overthrown, the priests distorted and covered up the records of the old worship. Only, however, in their usual incompetent fashion.

"But ye shall destroy their altars, break their

images, and cut down their groves" (Ex. xxxiv, 13). The modern priest will probably explain that literally to his confirmation class. But the words have been changed. "Grove" has no right in that galley. There would be an altar, an image, and a pole or post, not *grove*. One sees the hand of the redacting priest. If we look at II Kings xxiii, 6, we get an illuminating phrase about a "grove." "And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burnt it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder."

Groves were not kept in the "house of the Lord." But Asherah were. Poles were. These phallic symbols were.

"And Asa did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.....

"And he took away the Sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

"And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove ; and Asa destroyed her idol."

Dr. Oort says the correct rendering of that is : "She made on the Asherah something detestable."

Obviously, the customary phallic symbol on the idol.

"It seems plain," says Dr. Colenso, in a footnote in Dr. Oort's book (p. 46), "that the Asherah (from Asher, 'be straight,' 'erect') was in reality a phallus, like the Linga or Lingam of the Hindoos, the sign of the male organ of generation, employed as the symbol of the energizing, life-giving power of the sun..... The fact that Asa's mother had the detestable thing expressed in some way on one of these erections shows plainly the nature of the Asherah itself."

So writes Movers (p. 571) : "In the O.T. we have one passage referring to the idol Asherah, which leaves no just doubt that it was a phallus. The annalist of the history of the kings speaks of the worship of the

Asherah introduced by Rehoboam and of the Sodomites connected with it (I Kings xiv, 23, 24) ; and he adds that the Queen-Mother, Maachah, made a figure-of-shame on the Asherah, which Asa *hewed down*.

"What is here translated literally 'figure-of-shame' is in Hebrew *pudendum*, *verendum*, as also Jerome explains it, who translates the passage of Chronicles thus : *Sed et Maacham matrem Asa regis et augusto deposuit imperio, eo quod fecisset in luco simulacrum Priapi : comp. Jer. Comm. ad. Nos. iv.* From the comparison of this passage, according to which the wooden idol Asherah was a *pudendum*, with the other which indicates it as a high pillar, it is plain that it was a phallus, a symbol of the generating and fructifying power of nature."

"Perhaps the 'sacred men,' as they were called, who lodged within the walls of the temple at Jerusalem down almost to the end of the Jewish Kingdom, may have acted the part of the living Adonis to the living Astarte of the women. At all events, we know that in the cells of these strange clergy women wove garments for the *asherim*, the sacred poles which stood beside the altar and which appear to have been regarded by some as embodiments of Astarte. Certainly these 'sacred' men must have discharged some function which was deemed religious in the temple of Jerusalem ; and we can hardly doubt that the prohibition to bring the wages of prostitution into the house of God, which was published at the very same time as the men were expelled from the temple, was directed against an existing practice" (J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, "Adonis, Attis, Osiris," p. 14).

"Now we know that at all the old Canaanite sanctuaries, including the sanctuaries of Jehovah down to the reformation of Hezekiah and Josiah, the two regular objects of worship were a sacred stock and a sacred

stone, and that these sanctuaries were the seats of profligate rites performed by sacred men (Kedeshim) and sacred women (Kedeshoth)" (J. G. Frazer, *ib.*, p. 81).

Obviously phallic worship.

That the Israelites indulged in abominable religious practices is undeniable. Their prophets were continually railing against them. Jeremiah, who is the suggested author of Deuteronomy, says (xi, 13): "For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to *that shameful thing*, even altars to burn incense unto Baal." In Dahomey, said Sir Robert Burton, there was a phallic image at every street corner from Wydah to the capital. That was the sort of thing Jeremiah was thundering at.

The Jews made no distinction between "holy" and "harlot." The "holy" women who were sanctified to the temple were prostitutes; the men were Sodomites. This was the usage in the Hebrew temple. It is clear that one can harmonize it with phallic worship, because that is the way a religion can be turned and debased. It was the way the priests of Israel behaved.

Micah says (i, 7): "And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten in pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot."

This Jewish "house of God" was a huge brothel. The temple nuns were temple harlots, and they and the temple sodomites made money for the priests. There were "graven images" and other things. It is no wonder that now and again a prophet rose up and denounced the priestly caste and the people. The *Encyclopædia Biblica* (col. 2,066) speaks of "the licentious intercourse of men and women, in which the

priests and the consecrated women [religious prostitutes !] set the example." See also col. 1,964, where the "sacred" man is called a sodomite.

The Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was "exactly agreeable to the holy rites of Bacchus," says Plutarch.

"The Babylonian women of every rank and condition held it to be an indispensable duty of religion to prostitute themselves, once in their lives, in the temple of Mylitta, who was the same goddess as the Venus of the Greeks, to any stranger who came and offered money ; which, whether little or much, was accepted and applied to sacred purposes" (Hargrave Jennings, *Phallicism*, p. 46).

Dr. Adam Clarke (com. on II Kings xvii, 30) says : "Succoth-benoth may be literally translated the Tabernacle of the Daughters, or Young Women ; or if Benoth be taken as the name of a female idol, from *bnth*, to *build up, procreate, children*, then the words will express the Tabernacles sacred to the productive powers feminine. There is no room to doubt that these *succoth* were *tabernacles*, wherein young women exposed themselves to prostitution in honour of the Babylon goddess Melitta."

The Hebrews, in their chequered history, took their religion and learning from the nations round them. They borrowed right and left without scruple and without pause. The phallic cult enabled them to indulge their worst passions, and so it is that one reads of prophets rising up and denouncing the harlots and whoremongers, the prophets themselves having a moral outlook that would not be acceptable to-day.

With an understanding of this significance in the Bible, many passages that would otherwise be obscure are clear. Remnants of phallicism as well as of sun worship have been retained by the Christians in some old observance and practice.

On Friday the zealous Churchman eats fish, and



that custom is considered a survival of the days when a peculiar sexual signification was given to the fish, for it represented the greatest fertility. These old phallic symbols are worked in many church windows and designs. The cross, for instance, is a phallic symbol. The Christian thinks it is the emblem of his creed, but it was adopted by the Christians as a symbol only in the fourth century. It is not even included in Clement of Alexandria's list of Christian symbols.

"It may be at once boldly asserted as a truth that there is not a religion that does not spring from the sexual distinctions" (Hargrave Jennings, *Phallicism*, p. 20).

It must not be imagined that these were very ancient ideas, and that they were discarded by the Hebrews at the command of some winnowing prophet. The Bible, as we know, was constantly being re-doctored by priestly scribes who transformed the history of the past. They put into it what they wanted. The writer of the generation that followed the abandoning of Baal would have his generation's scorn for that particular form of worship, and would write of it with arid hate and command of imaginative detail. But he was not able to dispose of the evidence of rocks and other things. We know that fertility worship, both phallic and solar, went on long after Christ had lived and died. Relics of it remain with us unto this day.

A knowledge of human history allows us to see mankind struggling with fancies and ideas. In his primitive days his fancies are real to him; he does not know enough of nature to take a wide or deep view, and his passions are of such a kind as to lead him easily into excesses of a base order.

But now and again one man sees a little further and a little deeper than his generation, and attempts to enlighten them. There have been many such men,

and they have lifted mankind out of strange ruts and worse customs.

Sun worship, which was so prevalent, gave rise to manifold myths, which are quite easily traced. The mind of the heathen ran simply to what happened to the sun in its daily and yearly round, and he framed curious tales about it. We shall have to consider some of these tales because they are woven into Christianity.

A glance at the history of the Jews will let us see that they practically began their own records in the reign of Josiah. We are told that the book of the law was found. But, thousands of years before this, people in Egypt and India had laws and religions and a civilization to which that of the Hebrews was as a cowshed to a palace.

The Jews had as one of their gods Jehovah or Yaveh—IHVH. They endowed him with the qualities they esteemed: jealousy, might, bloodthirstiness, trickery, and fickleness. They had such an unhappy history that one does not wonder at the fact that they frequently ran after strange gods.

They evolved a worship like other people. It was full of curious rites mingled with a plentiful shedding of blood. They had a peculiar aptitude for slaughtering innocent animals. Without bloodshed there was no remission of sins.

Now and again one catches the full-throated note of a man who saw the empyrean and forgot the entrails of birds and beasts, but it is not sustained. There is a finer note in the New Testament.

Had Confucius been a Jew, he would have preached a message like Christ's. Chance took him east, whereas the gospel of the Nazarene came west, where the mighty Roman Empire was able to establish it among the institutions of determined men.

Between the Old Testament and the New there

seems to be a great gulf fixed. The reason is that the Christians took over the writings of the Jews because Jesus was a Jew, and they pretended there was a continuity in all these scriptures, because God—the Jehovah of the Jews, but now accompanied or assisted by two other gods, one named the Son and the other the Holy Ghost—had inspired them all.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NEW TESTAMENT : THE ATONEMENT

WHEN people are wiser they will be more careful than they are of thrusting and entrenching opinions into the young. Knowledge is slowly gathered, and opinions without knowledge are of little worth. To argue against prejudice is like attacking a walled city. Reason may some day gain the power of the high explosive shell, and so we have hope.

That we were taught in our childhood by our parents, priests, and teachers certain dogmas which they had been taught in their childhood, and which have become so fixed a part of our behaviour that it needs a kind of psychological surgical operation to remove them, is one of the pathetic facts in the history of mankind. But the operation is necessary. We must hold fast only to that which is true.

We propose to deal now with the New Testament.

When Jesus was born the Roman Empire was triumphant ; its power extended from Britain to Palestine. If people should thank the gods for their greatness, then the Romans owed much to the gods and the Jews very little.

The various peoples in the world worshipped different gods, most of them having an assortment, though there was a great resemblance between many, in spite of the different names.

This is the Christian faith :—

God made man. Man sinned. God so loved man that he was sorry for him, and sent his " Son " (who was also a God) to live as a man so that men would

put him to death. If men did put the "Son" of God to death, then God promised to forgive men for the sin which Adam and Eve committed.

The believer accepts the doctrine of original sin. He believes in "original sin" because the Church has said that our first parents sinned, and *therefore* all mankind were damned by an all-loving, just God. The Church has had to invent or deduce the theory of original sin because it had to find a justification for its theory that Jesus was the Son of God, and there must be a tremendous motive to make a just God send his only Son to suffer for sinful men.

We shall proceed on the assumption that Jesus lived, and that we may gather the principal tone of his very brief public life from the Bible. That hypothesis will suit us much better for argumentative purposes, and we should be sorry to feel that this gentle figure, despised and rejected as usual by the priests of his day, had not been of flesh and blood.

It will be convenient if we deal with the doctrine of Atonement first, because it is on that doctrine that we have had given to us the theory that man in a fanciful garden did something heinous which damned the whole human race, that there was no salvation for him unless God sent his Son to earth so that men could misunderstand him and put him to death. *It was Christ's DEATH that saved us; so that if the people had received Christ as Christ and not put him to death mankind could not have been saved.*

We feel there is nothing reasonable in that doctrine.

The rational view of life is that before man existed there were other creatures on the earth from which he developed. From savagery and barbarism he has passed to T. N. T., Wireless, Wimbledon, and Relativity.

The Christian says the Creator of the Universe made the first man Adam and the first woman Eve in the manner described in the Bible.

We must grapple with this view.

God has existed from all eternity. Comparatively recently, then, he—according to the Christian—decided to make man in his image. Being all-wise and all-powerful, he was able to make man as he wished. The Creator is alone responsible for the universe. Without him nothing was made. When he decided to make man we ought, then, to come to the conclusion that he made what, in his wisdom, was the best sort of man. He made man to sin, because if man had not had the power to sin given him by God he could not have sinned. God knew when Adam was made of what stuff he was made. He knew whether he could resist temptation or not. He made him obviously as he wished. And Adam, being made by God for God's purpose, fell. His fall is called "original sin."

The theory may be put thus :—

God in his wisdom introduced sin among mankind, and promptly cursed the whole of the human race—the millions and millions of unborn creatures—because Adam had behaved exactly as God knew he would behave !

The priest does not put the story like that, but essentially he teaches it.

He says God made everything.

Nothing exists except God made it.

Sin exists.

Therefore God made it.

Adam was made by God.

God knew what Adam would do when he was made.

Adam sinned.

Therefore God knew that Adam would sin when he made him.

What Christian can think of the doctrine of original sin and be happy?

We say frankly there was no actual Eden ; there was no serpent talking to a woman ; there was no "fall" such as theologians talk about. There has been a natural development of man, and this idea of original sin is one that might have been accepted in the dark ages, but can make no appeal to-day to even third-class minds.

That a just God would curse people through all eternity because Adam ate an apple or "knew" his wife is not worth discussing.

But the extraordinary thing is that Jesus, having been declared to be a god, is linked with this fable of the Garden of Eden, which, we have already seen, was borrowed by the Hebrews from the Babylonians.

A god takes the form of a man and lives among men.....

It is an astonishing story. One naturally asks, Why? *There has to be an answer.* So we get the story of Adam and Eve and a talking serpent.

But if the tale of man's "fall" is incredible, it weakens the theory of Christ's godhood. If the Garden of Eden story is mere invention, as it unquestionably is, then, if Jesus were God, he could not have come on earth to live as a man because of what Adam did. There must have been another reason. What was it? Why did he come?

The priests who have invented all these marvellous anthropomorphic, thaumaturgic tales have no gift for logic ; they are unable to find a better reason for Christ's incarnation, and so they cling to the story of the "fall." It gives them some explanation.

God, they say, who loves us all so dearly that, though when he made Adam he knew he was making some one who would fall, felt in his perfect justice that he must damn every babe born ! However—so the

priest tells us—God will be appeased if his “only Son” comes down to earth as a man and is killed by men !

A God will only be appeased by the death of his only Son !

That tale was begotten in a savage age. There is no love in it, no justice in it. It comes from some one who thinks in terms of savagery. Imagine a squire who has turned out a whole village because a man or a woman has taken an apple, and then saying : “I will relent if they will only kill my son !”

This doctrine is absurdity’s epitome.

Now it is obvious, on the priest’s own reasoning, that, if man could by his conduct have got rid of this terrible curse, there would have been no need for God to send his only Son to be murdered by men on earth. Presumably it was the only way.

But, in that case, the Bible is very misleading.

This is from the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel :—

“The word of the Lord came unto me, saying :

“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness.”

That text comes from the Lord—according to the priests, who preach inspiration and the doctrine of the divine authority of the scriptures. And the Lord said Noah, Daniel, and Job could deliver their own souls *by their righteousness*.

They could deliver their souls, and they could do it not through a redeemer, not through sacrifice, not through atonement or the vicarious suffering of another, but *by their own righteousness*.

If three men could save their own souls by living righteous lives, so could three million. There was, therefore, no need whatever for God to send his only Son to earth so that men should crucify him. That was not the only way. There was a much better way,



a far, far better way ; and that was for men to live righteous lives.

We are confirmed in this view by the teaching of Jesus himself, who knew better than any of his apostles or editors what was essential to salvation.

“ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running and kneeled to him, and asked him : Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? ” (Mark x, 17).

And Jesus, after reproving the young man for calling him good—which shows how clearly he realized his own imperfect humanity—said :—

“ Thou knowest the commandments : Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.”

As far as we can see, that is the plainest answer to the most vital question that one finds in this record of the life of the wonderful carpenter.

We have every sympathy with the yearning to see through the veil ; we can understand the exaltation of a certain type of religious enthusiast ; we regard with deep sympathy all those who would work for the purifying of man, for ridding him of his meanness, his grossness, his pettiness, his envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, if they will also unflinchingly pursue truth with equal zest. And that is why we feel the world has lost more than it can appreciate by the priestly interpretation of Christ's life and teaching. The plain man finds conduct is the head and front and body and soul of that teaching. Jesus wished to improve men's behaviour. And when he was asked what men had to do to inherit eternal life, he did not say : Believe in the virgin birth, in the divinity of Christ, in the Trinity, in transubstantiation ; he said : “ Live decent lives ; see that your behaviour is good.”

The follower of Christ needs no better answer than that provided by Christ himself.

But the priest will have none of it.

The curious thing is that leaders in the Christian Church have displayed a multiplicity of views in respect of atonement, as if it really eluded them.

Gregory of Nyssa regarded the deliverance of man as having been secured by deception on God's part. Satan was tricked into thinking Christ was a mere man ; and when Christ rose from the dead, Satan was defeated !

Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter Lombard also believed this !

If the fathers of the Church believed such things, no wonder the children's teeth are set on edge.

We do not wish to labour any point unduly. Our object is to persuade men and women of to-day to think for themselves ; and we are convinced that when they do that, day will break and the shadows flee away.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TRINITY

WHAT is it makes the Christian call himself a monotheist?

Nothing is more firmly taught the young than the dogma that there is one God. Poor heathens, we were told, worshipped many gods; but Christians, following in the path of the enlightened and chosen Jews, had ever held to the worship of the one true God.

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," says the priest; and the next moment he will talk of "God the Father," "God the Son," and "God the Holy Ghost."

Why three Gods? If three, why not four? And, in any case, why more than one? And how does the Christian *know* there are three Gods?

He should certainly be pressed for answers. A god who is made or created is not a god. A god has no limitations of time; otherwise some thing or some body existed before he did. We are not discussing what heathens have called gods, but what reasonable men understand by the deep significance of the term "God."

The Christian theory is this: God—consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—decides to make the earth and put on it a creature called man, to look after it. The three gods agree. But man falls. The priest suggests that the three gods discussed the matter, and decided that one of them should become a man and die, and then that would satisfy the three of them. But this same priest talks as if there were only two gods at times. A domestic picture haunts

him ; he talks of Father and Son. " For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son " to die for us. Why leave out all mention of the Holy Ghost ? We are told in the Creed that the three persons of the Trinity are co-equal and *co-eternal* together—which we agree must be true if there are three gods.

Then why call one the Son ? There can be no " father " and no " son " among gods. Gods are not dated. A god must be eternal, or he is no god. God called the " Son " must be eternal. In that case, he has lived just as long as the " Father. " Then why talk of " Father " and " Son " ? It is misleading, because it is likely to persuade people to think that there exists between two of the gods the relationship of son and father ; and, if that is so, the son cannot be a god.

Jesus, however—so the Christians say—was a god. He is equal to the other two gods, who with him make up the Trinity. Perplexity grows. God, therefore, did *not* send his " only begotten Son " ; he had no begotten son. A god is not " begotten " ; he has always existed. When Christians talk of " Father " and " Son " among gods, they talk nonsense. If there are three gods, as Christians say—though we are not persuaded that they clearly understand or firmly believe it—then those three gods are co-equal and co-eternal together. That is what the old-established and well-regulated Churches say.

And so we come back to our unravelable knot.

If three gods exist, one cannot be the " son " of another. But the Bible says one is a son. Therefore, if he is a son he is not a god.

It is the duty of the Christian teacher to explain why he says there are three gods, and why he calls one " Father, " another " Son, " and another " Holy Ghost. "

Shall we hazard an explanation? The Bible, not being inspired by God, and not being edited by a wise and competent man, betrays the fallibility of humanity in every book. When the story of Jesus came to be written, and men let their fancy fly on priestly pinions, they made Jesus a god, and called him the "Son of God." And they introduced a Holy Ghost in the story because there was a Holy Ghost in the tale which they borrowed from the Egyptians when they wrote of the annunciation and the incarnation; and, generally, spirits or ghosts were in the air.

And the heirs of these writings had to make a creed out of them, which has been to some a stumbling-block and to more foolishness, for in this severely monotheistic religion there appeared three gods. And yet there were not three gods, but one god. And one is the Father, one is the Son, and one the Holy Ghost; and yet they are all equal and eternal together, and therefore nobody has the right to label one "Father," and another "Son," and another "Holy Ghost"; for such as the Father is such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

His punishment for not believing this is eternal damnation.

It is too great a punishment, in our opinion, for any one who is cowardly enough to pretend to accept this impossible doctrine of the Trinity.

We will venture to give the reader an explanation that will satisfy his reason.

Three is a magic number. Some people will say it is phallic, and that, as religions have become more and more purified, the reasons lying behind certain dogmas have been lost, and so the dogmas are perplexing. There is no doubt that when we trace

religion back to oriental sources we find the figure three.

The Trinity flourishes in India : Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The ancient Egyptians worshipped a Trinity. The oracle of Serapis used to answer : " First God, afterward the Word, and with them the Holy Spirit ; all these are of the same nature, and make but one whole, of which the power is Eternal."

The " word " or logos idea we see was captured later by the Christian writer who wrote the Gospel according to St. John.

The ancient Greeks were superstitious about the number three. Orpheus wrote : " All things were made by one godhead in three names."

The ancient Persians, the Assyrians, the Phœnicians, the Scandinavians, the Druids, worshipped a Trinity.

This doctrine was ultimately fought out by Christians hundreds of years after Christ's death. The dogma was established by a vote which settled the creed for Christians presumably for all time.

## CHAPTER XI

### JESUS

WE do not propose to write a life of Jesus ; it is merely our intention to see if all the priest has said about him is true.

The man at the hearth notices the gap there is between the Old and New Testament. There seems a big hiatus. What happened between "Malachi" and the Gospel according to St. Matthew?

Things went on as before. In the temple at Jerusalem they read the old rolls, made the same old comments, and led the same old debased life.

Suddenly a figure appeared whose life has ploughed such a furrow across man's history that the harvest of the human race has been changed.

But for some hundreds of years after the death of Jesus the Church had no "inspired" Bible to show to the people. For some hundreds of years after the death of Jesus the Christians had books, but no Bible. The writings during that time were as varied in tone and doctrine as pamphlets issuing from Roman Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, Non-conformist, Christian Science, Salvation Army, and Unitarian quarters differ to-day.

Then came the battle round dogma and script, and leading Christians argued and decided what books should form the Bible and what not. And that is how we got what the priests call the "Word of God."

In these scriptures we can find the doctrines that the priests teach, and we shall see how they will stand the test of common sense.

No one knows when Jesus was born. This great event, which is described with such details in the gospels, passed so unnoticed that a fanciful date had afterwards to be chosen for his birthday, *and a memorable day in the ritual of another religion was adopted.*

Of the early years of Jesus we know practically nothing. There is one snap-shot of him talking to the elders in the synagogue, asking and answering questions ; it is what we should expect from a serious child, for it is a common experience for priests to have questions asked them, their stories being so astonishing.

We are told that Jesus made nothing of a public appearance or stir till he was about thirty years of age. His life as a preacher lasted only a year, though some say three years, because both impressions can be gathered from the Bible. What Jesus was doing during the first thirty years of his life we do not know.

His father was a carpenter called Joseph, and there was a pretty large family. Jesus must not have felt himself early called to any particular mission, or he would have made some public appearance before the age of thirty. It may be he worked in his father's shop ; it may be he became a member of some sect like the Essenes. What we gather from the accounts of his life is that his sympathies were altogether with the poor and heavy laden ; his view of the rich was that they had small chance of getting to heaven, whereas he seemed to think the poor went there by a sort of right.

He had a great scorn and indignation for all those who played the part of the pettifogging priest. Although he was a Jew and kept the Mosaic feasts, he was not afraid to break through regulations when he saw they offended common sense. His charm



was his reasonableness and his gentleness; his strength was his moral courage and insistence on conduct. He was not the first to preach a gospel of love; but it was a strange gospel at that time among the Jews, for the official classes, the priests, and others looked for the advent of a Messiah who would give them power and glory and plenty of bloodshed. As they waited, these priestly and other classes behaved as if they inhabited a city of abomination.

Jesus was probably stirred to public action by a prophet called John the Baptist, who had the root of the matter in him, for he preached repentance and the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven, which was what Jesus preached after he had been baptised by John.

Jesus developed fast after contact with John. He became a sort of itinerant preacher. He did not merely go into the desert or the wilderness, but into the villages and towns. Naturally, he gathered followers, and we are given the names of twelve, as if they represented the months of the year, who have been called "apostles."

Jesus never hesitated to attack the Pharisees and people of that class, and he went so far on one occasion, in spite of his gentleness, to use violence on the people who desecrated, as he thought, the temple.

He was essentially a Jew. On one occasion, when a Syrophenician woman asked him to cast a devil out of her daughter, he said: "Let the children first be fed; for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

The phrase offends us, though perhaps the Syrophenicians were accustomed to that sort of address from Jews. However, this particular woman made a beautiful reply. She apparently was of that meekness and gentleness plus common sense that Jesus

loved, for she said : " Yes, Lord, yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

Jesus was won at once. He said unto her : " For this saying go thy way : the devil is gone out of thy daughter." What he would not do for Syrophenicia he would do for wit and gentleness.

In another account he is reported to have said : " I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." The two accounts refer to the same incident, but, being written by different people at different times, they naturally present differences, for the documents have not been edited with sufficient care.

Jesus naturally believed in " devils," because they were generally believed in in those days, as miracles and witches were. He offended the upper classes, particularly the Pharisees and priestly orders, but the poor people believed him gladly. That would be natural. It was no wonder he was now and then wildly acclaimed by the mob, and that the stiff-necked priests were disturbed.

He did not live an austere life like John the Baptist, for we read of him at a marriage feast where there was apparently plenty of wine ; and he was fond of staying with a family that consisted of a brother and two sisters—Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. He did not mind who his companions were—whether they were publicans, sinners, or harlots. Mary of Magdala, who was a harlot and reputed to have been possessed of seven devils, was particularly devoted to him. But as harlots among the Jews were consecrated to the service of God, this companionship of Jesus and Mary Magdalene was probably thought no more of than harlotry is to-day in certain strata of good society.

All the time Jesus preached the gospel of poverty, of compassion, of meekness, of peace and love.

The Jews were accustomed to these itinerant preachers, who were generally called prophets, with

the consequence that some of them wondered if Jesus were one of the old prophets come to life again, for notions of that kind were accepted in those days. But some hoped more than that : they began to see in Jesus the promised Messiah.

Jesus, with his penetration into the heart of things, had seen that not purple and fine linen, not gold and silver nor precious stones, not ceremonial nor observances, not might, nor power, nor armies, were the things that mattered, but a humble and a contrite heart, a heart that sympathized and understood, that shared all, forgave all, loved all. No Kingdom could stand beside this Kingdom. It was the Kingdom of Heaven.

One can extract this glow of beauty from Christ's teaching ; but the mass of priests and rulers will not look at it to-day, any more than the Pharisees did.

If Jesus thought he was the Messiah, and construed his Kingdom as of the heart, so that human conduct should blossom like the rose, his followers were not equal to the thought. They almost squabbled about the thrones they were to sit on.

Christ, as the central figure, may have foreseen the result. Power is got rid of only by power. Jesus was not the man to remove those in high places, even though the poor waved palm leaves and cheered him. Palm leaves are no use against spears.

The priests naturally hated or despised Jesus. He never bothered about ritual. He had no zeal for ceremonial. His cry for a pure and contrite heart was not the cry of the Pharisees or Sadducees. That he was more concerned with conduct than with temples is shown by the fact that he did not even encourage his disciples to pray till they asked him for a prayer, and reminded him that the disciples of John the Baptist prayed.

The end has been vividly<sup>3</sup> described. It was the

Feast of the Passover, and Jesus, being a sufficiently observing Jew for that, prepared to keep the feast with his disciples.

The preparations for the entry into Jerusalem went on, and apparently the scribes and chief priests "sought how they might kill him, for they feared the people."

Jesus saw that the gospel of doing justly and loving mercy and deliverance for the poor was not one to commend itself to chief priests and scribes.

And at a memorable supper, when he realized that his part in the preaching of his gospel would soon come to an end, he thought of this as their last supper together. It was a pathetic moment. Jesus faced it with his sublime sweetness.

As he broke the bread he suggested that when they had suppers like that in the future they should remember him. He is reported to have said: "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." A touching and poetic idea. And when they took the wine after the supper it is suggested he said: "This cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for you."

Jesus was arrested. He was charged with "corrupting the people."

It is the sort of charge that has rung down the ages whenever any one has tried to fight against the established order of things. The reformer, the prophet, the seer, is always a corrupter of the people in the eyes of those who sit on cushions in comfortable places.

Between two thieves Jesus was crucified, and while he was on the cross he let fall that heart-wrung, human cry: "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

The Jews went on with their religious practices as before. The Romans worshipped their many gods.

And slowly Christianity took root.

## CHAPTER XII

AFTER CHRIST'S DEATH—HOW THE CHRISTIANS WAITED—THERE WERE NO BOOKS—THE CHRISTIANS BORROWED FROM THE PAGANS—THE STRUGGLE FOR POPULARITY—HOW THE CREED WAS ELABORATED—THE COUNCIL OF NICÆA

It is possible that for a time Christ's followers were dumbfounded at what had happened. They believed he was the Messiah, and he was dead ! They thought he would come again with great power ; and so they waited for this second coming, as there are people to-day who wait for it.

They had no Bible ; they had only the old books of the Jews. If they met, they may have read part of the old scriptures, and then talked of the new gospel of love and the hope of the Messiah's second coming. That kind of message always makes converts. Give people hope, and you can bind them with green withes.

People who have trusted to miracles or the supernatural have always been disappointed.

Time went on. The groups of waiting Christians enlarged. The conviction of the Messiah-ists would infect others. "Christ is coming again !" would be a rousing rallying cry. The doubters, the feeble, and the fanatical would all wish to be on the right side.

Yet this preaching of the coming again of Christ as the Messiah was a doctrine that did not reach the people whose names are now of any moment to us. It would be interesting to have the views of Seneca or Plutarch or Pliny the Elder or Philo, or those who

wrote at that time on these Christians. But we don't get a word.

And yet one can see how the Messiah notion can have made converts both among Jews and Gentiles. People at that age, as in this, were almost glad to swallow with fervour what others said, particularly if it related to the coming of the Messiah, who was not the exclusive Jewish Messiah, because Gentiles were to be admitted as his disciples as well as Jews.

There would naturally be trouble over that. Prejudices die hard. But apparently Christianity was to be preached to Syrophenician women and others as well as to Jews.

And what was the creed during these early years—say, twenty or thirty after Christ's death? There was no creed. Christ had died to save mankind; he was going to come again and take all his followers to Heaven. There was no idea in those days of saying, "I believe in one God the Father Almighty," etc. There was no mention of the terrible fact that if you were not baptised by a Roman Catholic priest you would go to Hell. In those early days after Christ's death the priests had not had time to put their hands violently on the religion of the Christians and make it a thing of articles and creeds and ceremonies and sacraments and observances and confessions and penances and indulgences and pardons and excommunications and anathemas and incense and bells and Peter's pence and fire and slaughter and torture and cant and hypocrisy.

Naturally, in those early years the chief topic of conversation at the little gatherings of Christians would be Jesus—what he had said, what he had done. That man does not understand human nature who thinks no exaggeration would get into these stories. Also a little invention. Remember the time. There was no printing press; few read, and fewer wrote.

Communication between places was slow and cumbersome. A report spread in one town was not heard in the next town for years, perhaps, when it was hopeless to attempt to contradict it.

Now, Jesus being the head and fount of this new sect, it was natural that at last there should be writings about him. Somebody had to put pen on paper and write. Some of his sayings would be remembered, some of his doings recalled.

It is difficult to recall accurately. It is difficult for many to distinguish between what is true and what is false. Some write the false, and many accept it as true.

Years had passed since the death of Jesus. The spoken word was apt to grow and assume a colour it had not originally had; the written word was even more different from the thing meant to be represented. And few things make a fiercer crucible of change than fanaticism.

Jesus was the Messiah; therefore what was prophesied about the Messiah must have come to pass in Jesus. Jesus did such and such things; but he was the Messiah, therefore those things had been prophesied. In one case the event was described; in the other the prophecy duly appeared somewhere.

People who had never seen him but had been converted became the fiercest of Christians. They were the ones who pretended to understand him best. The further one got from Christ, the more details one got about him and fuller and fuller became his teaching.

In other words, men behaved just as we should imagine they would. For forty years at least after Christ's death we know of nothing that was written definitely about Jesus of Nazareth. During all that time tales waxed in fibre and flower. Imagine small groups of Welsh people talking enthusiastically of Mr. Lloyd George. One tongue would outstrip the other as the other disciple did outrun Peter. In forty

years' time, if one could imagine a community that had leisure to dream and had verbal wings, we should have legends of Lloyd George that would, we fancy, beat the original. Think how tales grow. During the war we saw them spring up in a night. There were people who came forward ready to be tested on oath as eye-witnesses of the great Russian army that phantomly travelled through England. We have not yet mastered our imaginations, our tongues, or our pens. Make a man a hero, and what a hero he becomes! Contemporaries see the little things, the tricks and dodges; posterity sees only the big achievements; fanatics see their dreams.

Jesus was the Messiah who was to come. So men thought of him, and talked of him.

Naturally, during all these years of incubation the tales took on the hue of the teller. Now all the writers about Jesus were not merely religious; they were fanatically so. This was a new creed, and they had the fervour and fire of proselytes. They had the scruples of the age, which were few; the credulity, which was great; the myths, which were many.

The first writings, as we have suggested, were probably nothing more than simple letters to friends in other places giving certain remembered or hearsay tales of Christ's life. But we know nothing of these early letters.

We cannot fix the precise date when the Gospels became part of the service of the Christians, but it is not early. It is suggested by Church people that the Gospels—not that “according to St. John”—were written some time after 70 A.D. But the Oxford Society of Historical Theology appointed a committee to search the writings of Christians earlier than the year 130 of the Christian era for evidence that they were acquainted with the synoptics. No reference was found to any of the gospels.



Think of this curious time. For nearly a hundred years after the death of Christ there is nothing authoritative to give to the brethren. Every one writes or tells what he wishes. Spirits glow and fancy flies. All sorts of things are suggested. The priestly scribe who knows the current views about gods and dogmas drags them in if he feels inclined. Men mix up the Mosaic law with Hellenism, like Philo; others impose the Mosaic law on Christianity, like Peter; some make a blend of Christianity and Hellenism, like John; others, again, fight for the newer ideas in which Jew and Gentile are treated alike and circumcision is not necessary. And myth is the core and kernel.

Besides the early gospels, which were either sayings of Jesus or anecdotes, there were epistles passing to and fro in which men assumed names and propagated doctrines and attacked one another, and generally behaved like a bunch of fervent men whose opinions differed.

Now, nobody, during all these years, sees the slightest sign from Heaven. The Creator has no more shown himself to these sincere, quarrelling, foolish, lying, holy men than he did to the prophets and priests of the Old Testament.

Every step on the road is human. In the course of time certain writings were considered of more value than others, just as the men who form Cabinets and shadow Cabinets are supposed to be more important than others. "A gospel according to Mark" was treasured. What happened was that other people got hold of this gospel "according to Mark" and began to copy it, there being no printing machines in those days, and betrayed at once the hand of the ready writer and the touch of the true redactor. It is doubtful if there was such a person as a faithful copyist in those days. The copier was stirred to add, subtract, and modify the moment he read. *This oldest gospel*

*had no account of the birth, childhood, or resurrection of Jesus !*

The tales that circulated when Mark wrote (or copied) his gospel ran round Christ's teaching and behaviour. But ideas grew. All Churches are forcing-houses for ideas. Gods rose from the dead : that was the accepted myth. Gods have been put to death for ages in other religions or myths, but they rose again. If Christ were a God, he must rise again. So some subsequent "redactor"—it is the word the Christian authorities use, but "inventor" or "forger" seems to fit the case more accurately—added to Mark's gospel a tale of the resurrection ! The gospel according to St. Mark ends at verse 8, chapter xvi ; the addition is a forgery !

It would take far too long to write a history of this period of the early Church and the manufacture of its documents and dogmas. But one can easily see how the documents grew. The Spiritualists of to-day have documents ; the Christian Scientists have documents. Both these sects have published more reading matter than there is in the Bible ; but though what they have written has been produced by sincere, fervent believers, yet the Churches do not claim for their productions the authority of God.

The early Christians were possessed of zeal. But while Salvationists and Roman Catholics nowadays are autocratically ruled, and can be kept within the strict lines of orthodox belief, it was not so easy to damp down opinions in the early days of the Church, for that was when they sprouted. They sprouted in different places at once, and did not harmonize. So "epistles" were written to show why the doctrine of A should be accepted and that of B trodden under foot. And as, in matters of this kind, the names of leaders would carry most weight, so letters were written in the name of one "Paul" that Paul had never indited nor seen.

One "school" would be opposed by another school, and all this diversity of opinion led to the multiplication of "authoritative" letters or epistles. This is from "The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians":—

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and Sosthenes our brother.

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth.....

"For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."

Clearly, they were not a perfectly united family at Corinth.

Some of these letters or pamphlets were direct and fine. The writers had something to say, even though they borrowed from other writers and assumed pen-names. The older writings were added to or parts were deleted according as they supported or opposed or were indifferent to certain prevailing doctrines.

The notions about Christ grew. His followers began to argue about him. Was he pure god? Or god and man? And was he equal to the Father? Or not quite equal?.....

The theological questions arose as political questions will, and so there had to be councils which were like "Internationals" or "Trades Union Congresses" or "Select Committees." And naturally a verse was slipped in here or a passage there to endorse or confirm or strengthen some particular opinion. It was always well to have the backing of the written word, if possible.

These Christians grew fiercer and fiercer, as if dispute, contemplation, and religious ecstasy egged them on. They held to their creed fervently, even though

they understood it but vaguely. They preached a doctrine that was comforting and universal, and were prepared to die for it. In every age, in every clime, people have died for a religion which they have but ill understood and other people have scorned.

Some of the "fathers" composed lists of "books" which could or ought to be read at meetings, but that was merely a personal selection, and was not authoritative till nearly two hundred years had passed.

In the meanwhile doctrines as well as epistles were manufactured. They were manufactured without regard to truth. "It was admitted and avowed that to deceive into Christianity was so valuable a service as to hallow deceit itself" (Dean Milman). "In the first ages of the Church, so extensive was the licence of forging, so credulous were people in believing, that the evidence of transactions was grievously obscured" (Bishop Fell).

Christianity had obviously desperate and determined men to urge its progress. They were ready to invent ceremonies to allure converts. The end justified the means. Mosheim (*Church History*, chapter iv) says: "There is good reason to suppose that the Christian bishops purposely multiplied sacred rites for the sake of rendering the Jews and the pagans more friendly to them. For both these classes had been accustomed to numerous and splendid ceremonies from their infancy.....And hence, when they saw the new religion to be destitute of such ceremonies, they thought it too simple and therefore despised it..... The Christians were pronounced Atheists because they were destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests, and all that pomp, in which the vulgar suppose the essence of religion to consist.....To silence this accusation, the Christian doctors thought they must introduce some external rites, which would strike the senses of the people.....

## 92 THE STRUGGLE FOR POPULARITY

“Among the Greeks and the people of the East nothing was held more sacred than what were called the *Mysteries*. This circumstance led the Christians, in order to impart dignity to their religion, to say that *they* also had similar *mysteries* or certain holy rites concealed from the vulgar ; and they not only applied the terms used in the pagan mysteries to the Christian institutions, particularly baptism and the Lord’s supper.....”

That gives us from a Christian historian a view of these wide-awake rulers of Christianity in its early days. They were, as we can see, alert, capable, adaptable, and very business-like.

“There exists not,” says Justin Martyr, “a people, whether Greek or barbarian, or any other race of men, by whatsoever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell under tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers are not offered up in the name of a crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.”

It is not true, but it reads superbly. With a spirit like this to urge it forward, a spirit that reminds us of the bold, unwinking advertising of to-day, that refuses to notice the strict limits of accuracy and sees only the big aim, it is no wonder Christianity made progress. But the real turning-point was not some spiritual fact, not some miracle, not a sign from Heaven or the word made perfect ; it was when the murderer, Constantine, took Christianity under his wing.

Constantine was a picturesque if lurid figure in the history of the world. At one time he had no particular god ; he adopted his father’s for a better reason than many sons can allege—viz., that his father had prospered. It is not a subtle or theological reason, but it is practical. Constantine, meeting with success, became more and more convinced of the advantage of

being a Christian. And when one realizes that at that time Rome ruled the world, one can also see what an advantage it was to Christianity to be accepted by such a powerful, even if somewhat reprehensible, a man as Constantine.

This was three hundred years after Christ. Christianity had been struggling, and, like other religions, had by this time been able to develop both doctrine and design. How it developed some of the doctrines and much of the design we can gather from Mosheim, who says: "For the Christian bishops introduced with but slight alterations, into the Christian worship, those rites and institutions by which formerly the Greeks, Romans, and other nations had manifested their piety and reverence towards their imaginary deities: supposing that the people would more readily embrace Christianity if they saw that the rites handed down to them from their fathers still existed unchanged among the Christians, and perceived that Christ and the martyrs were worshipped in the same manner as formerly their gods were. There was, of course, little difference in these times between the public worship of the Christians and that of the Greeks and Romans."

So in following the progress of Christianity we find the mind and hand of man in its bone and marrow. The simple tale is enlarged and distorted. The ceremony is invented to please; it is enlarged and distorted. The hand of a man, an assassin, is welcomed by the Christian leaders, because it is a helping hand, and the bloodstains must be accepted with the assistance.

And man's mind is occupied with all sorts of interpretations which arise out of the circulating scripts. These things can be decided only like resolutions and proposals can be decided at a big political gathering—by argument and the counting of noses. That is human—essentially human. Where is there the

faintest glimmer of light from Heaven in all this? Where has divine guidance or divine inspiration shown itself? We have seen forgeries, quarrels, inventions, imitations, but not once the sign that would let us feel that men spoke the truth when they said they possessed the Word of God.

Let us glance for a moment at a meeting in Nicæa, where the creed was thrashed out. There can be nothing more vital than a creed. It is not merely the alpha and omega, but all the other letters as well. It is the beginning, middle, and end of a man's religion. If there is one thing that should come to a man with clarion clearness, it is his creed.

We may be sure that if the Creator of the Universe had wished man to know exactly what was to be believed he would have made it indubitably plain. *If he wished men to live good lives, to think well, and always act honestly, and let them grope incessantly for truth, then he would not give them a set creed.* But man loves making creeds as he loves making gods.

The Christians had to have a settled creed because one bishop was saying one thing and another something quite different. And if to believe what is not true is sinful, what has been the unhappy lot of those poor people who died with an ironical smile at Heaven as they hugged to their bosom some quaint but treasured heresy? But what may be still more disturbing is the thought that the right doctrine may have been discarded and the wrong one finally adopted. Suppose Christians took the wrong turning in the early days.

These bishops were but men who believed in devils and witches, and that the sun went round the earth. Gregory Nazianzen ventured to speak thus of these momentous gatherings: "I never yet saw a council of bishops come to a good end." "I salute them afar off, since I know how troublesome they are."

"I never more will sit in those assemblies of cranes and geese."

But it was these "assemblies of cranes and geese" that formulated creeds and made Bibles!

To be candid, these old councils were worse conducted than an "International."

The Council of Nicæa was held in 325 A.D. Rather a long time to have waited before telling worshippers what they had to believe, particularly in a Church where *belief* is everything. Constantine, the assassin, was in the chair. Alexander of Alexandria, Eusebius, Athanasius, Arius, Hosius, and other bishops and presbyters were there to argue and decide what Christians should believe.

The principal discussion at this meeting centred round the description of Jesus as the "Son of God." Some said there was a time when Jesus did not exist; therefore God made him. He had to make him to be able to send him down to earth to live as a man. They got to this: that there was a God the Father, who was the Almighty; Jesus was "the first born of every creature and begotten of the Father." And there was also a Holy Ghost.

Eusebius of Nicomedia suggested that if they said the Son was not created by the Father he must therefore be of one substance with the Father, and to say that was absurd.

The fat was in the fire. Those who called Jesus the Son said he had been begotten or created. Those who realized that that took something from his godhood (and to take anything from godhood is to take all) opposed it ferociously, and declared the Son and the Father were one and had always existed together. The Arians said that was preposterous, for Jesus was the Son of God.

It would be interesting to hear a discussion by bishops on the theory of the Trinity to-day. One



has only to follow the arguments closely to see they were emitted by a group of priests, some more fanatical than others, and one side of which at the end gained the majority.

Socrates (the historian) said the combatants did not know each other's terms ; each agreed in the personal existence of the Son, and acknowledged the unity of God in three "Persons." The faith of Christianity depended upon whether the majority at Nicæa voted for *homooousion* or for *homoiousion*.

It was argument, argument, argument ; plus threats, invectives, and insults.

But where was the voice of God ? In Arius or in Athanasius ? The Arians could not see how the *Son* could be "of one substance" with the *Father*, and the Athanasians how Jesus could be less than God.

So, after the argument, they counted noses, and as there happened to be more Athanasian noses than Arian, Athanasius won ! They got things over in a hurry, because they feared if they talked much longer of *homooousion* and *homoiousion* the Christian Emperor would get so bored he would go back to Paganism. (See Stanley, *History of the Eastern Church*, p. 137.)

But where was the divine guidance ?

Only 300 bishops were present out of 1,800, and five years later Constantine declared he agreed with Arius ! He recalled him from exile, and so the persecuted bishops now began to persecute their persecutors. Constantine was baptised by an Arian bishop ; Arius died, it is presumed by poison, convenient if not episcopal, and Athanasius once more got the upper hand.

But, again, where is the finger of God in all this ?

The creed of the Christian is something about which no mistake can be made. A mistake is not merely fatal ; it is damning. Salvation depends on

faith. By our faith we are saved or damned—according to the Christian. Yet when we see how this creed was put together we feel somehow that Christians ought to tremble. The great solace of religion, however, is that the devotee must not think.

“Notoriously there is neither dogma nor rite in the system of the Church, which has not a long history to tell of its growth into settled form. It took two centuries and a-half to determine the relation of the Son to God the Father; nor will any one who is even slightly acquainted with the ante-Nicene literature affirm that Athanasius would have been content with the doctrinal professions of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian, all of whom in their economy of the ‘divine’ nature distinctly subordinated the Second Member of the Trinity to the First. For three centuries more it remained unsettled whether Christ had more than one nature and one will, the forces of opinion swaying to and fro for generations before a predominance was won and opposition driven from the field. How little concord had been reached respecting the Third Person of the Trinity, more than fifty years after the Council of Nicæa, Gregory Nazianzen tells us in these words: ‘Of our thoughtful men, some regard the Holy Spirit as an operation, some as a creature, some as God; while others are at a loss to decide, seeing that Scripture determines nothing on the subject.’ A year later the bare phrase of the original Nicene Creed, ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost,’ was enriched at the Council of Constantinople by the added attributes: ‘The Lord, the Giver of life, that proceedeth from the Father; that with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; that spake by the prophets’; and not till the year 589, and then only in Spain, was the recital introduced that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son as well as from

the Father " (Martineau, *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 134).

Creeds, like trees, have been things of slow growth, and none has been able to tell what precise shape they would take.

The Christian Bible was gradually put together in the same way as the creed. Men met, argued, and nodded heads. A book which professed to have been written by somebody who knew somebody who had been with Jesus would have an authoritative air. Such, let us concede, was the Gospel according to Mark. Others which were written by people who did not know anybody who knew somebody who had been with Jesus would not carry the same weight.

Then books or letters or pamphlets, if one cares so to label them, which harmonized with accepted doctrines would be welcomed, whereas those which blurted out facts that had become disagreeable because they did not fit comfortably with the new doctrines would be discarded.

The Roman Catholics do not like to read the fact that Joseph and Mary had a large family, and that Jesus was one member of it. They call Mary a virgin, and dislike the thought that she had a good many children. It is a great grief to them that in the accepted canon there are phrases which show that Jesus was not the only child of Joseph and Mary. Books were produced by the Mariolaters in which Mary was supposed to have ascended into Heaven. These books were not written by anybody who had ever heard Jesus speak, or even spoken to anybody else who had heard him; they were composed by the priestly mind that loves the mysterious and the incredulous, and they wormed their way into the religious literature of the time, competing with the rest.

There were books pretending to tell of the boyhood of Jesus in which all sorts of childish miracles and

tricks were attributed to him; there was a book written by vegetarians; there was one setting forth the view that a god could not be human—which is a very reasonable view; in the Gospel according to St. Peter the plea was put forward that Christ's *appearance* was human, but it was only a sham: he was always purely divine.

If all these strange productions are read, one sees the mind of man groping with religion in all its manifold mystifications. The ideas that were not acceptable were passed by, and so there was ultimately evolved a Bible. And the curious thing is that Christian bodies, who claim not merely to have the intelligence of men but the guidance of God, cannot even agree as to what is and is not God's Word!

A sort of canon was accepted by the Church at the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 360. During all that time there had been no authoritative canon; but even to-day, nearly two thousand years after Christ, Christian leaders and bodies disagree about what is an inspired book and what is not.

The Ethiopic Canon contains eight books which are not found in our New Testament. The Canon of the Greek Church omits Revelation and includes books not recognized as canonical by others.

Quite a number of early writings were considered scriptural and really canonical in the early Church which later generations discarded—as, for instance, the Epistle of Clement, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas.

Martin Luther would have excluded Hebrews, James, Jude, and the Apocalypse from the New Testament.

All these books, as one sees, are written by men, chosen by men, elevated by men. From first to last we look in vain for a sign from some other world,

from some other source than man. We see nothing. From the story of Adam and Eve to the Revelation we read in the Bible tales, exhortations, songs, pleadings, cursings, comfortings, visions, all written with the skill, the fervour, the fire, the beliefs, hopes, and failings of man. The New Testament is as human as the Old. We are convinced they are man's handiwork.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IS THE FUNDAMENTAL THEORY OF CHRISTIANS TRUE?—REASON *v.* BELIEF

LET us now examine the problem that stares us in the face when we are told that the coming of Jesus on earth was the most momentous fact in the history of the world, that it was arranged by the Godhead out of love for mankind, and that it was necessary for the salvation of the whole human race.

We have already dealt with what appears to us the incredible assumption that an all-wise God should make a man in such fashion that he would fall, and then condemn every man, woman, and child born after him to eternal damnation because of that particular fall.

The theory that God decided to give the world another chance after Adam's "fall" disturbs us. The history of the world as related in the Bible does not suggest it. If God really meant to send everybody to Hell because of that incident in the Garden of Eden, we are surprised at what we read in "God's Word" about his alleged familiarity with Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and a great many other people of the Semitic race. Still, we will follow the argument of the Christian and see if common sense can abide it.

Let us say here that when we discuss these divine plans and actions we are dealing solely with the story as told by the priests. We are not discussing the Almighty. We are not attempting to criticize God. Our view is that fervent but ignorant men in ages

past had strange views of God ; that these views were changed and elaborated and spiritualized, if you will, as the generations rolled by ; but that people, being made to accept religious stories in their childhood and youth, have been loath to criticize them. It seemed a sin to suggest that something said about religion was not true. That, of course, was the atmosphere all religious teachers endeavoured to create and maintain. It made teaching easy. But it also made the taught mere automatons. We have seen that quite clearly in those cases when men of intellectual distinction have professed to find all things true and of good report in Christianity for many years, and then have suddenly decided to see if really what they have been told was true. Bishop Colenso is an example. But a better example is the belief in witchcraft. We should call people fools who believed in witchcraft to-day ; there never was such a thing as a witch. Yet the Church taught belief in witchcraft ; the Bible gave its terrible authority to that belief. The finest intellects in the world of Christianity believed in witchcraft because they were taught to believe and not encouraged to think. The difference to the world was stupendous. Belief was obviously in that matter a curse of colossal proportions.

When common sense had ventured to raise its head and men used their reason by finding courage, the earth was a happier place. Belief was trodden underfoot, and instead of agony and bloody sweat we had sanity and peace.

Our view is that there still remains in religion too much "belief." The great religious leaders have always struck the note of conduct. The priestly mind runs to ceremonials and creeds. We believe the priests are wrong, and that they do the world wrong. So when we discuss the dogmas of the Church we are not discussing God ; we are all the

time examining the doctrines of the Church and its claims to divine revelation and inspiration.

The essence of the Christian faith is that a man shall believe Jesus was a god, and that he died to save the human race being damned everlastingly, as God had at one time proposed. If men and women believe this, and say they are sorry for their sins, and have also taken care to be baptised, they will go to Heaven when they die. The alternative is Hell.

It may be that human beings ought to have a religious faith ; but, if so, we find it very difficult for many people to make a choice. We are most of us creatures of environment and education, and the Hindoo, the Esquimaux, the Chinaman, and the Englishman all seem to have their faiths handed to them when they are young and unable to weigh them in the scales of reason. In any case, there can surely be no valid argument against a thorough examination into the claim of any religion to possess the true faith.

God, the Christians say, is justice incarnate. Now and again we hear some one also saying that God is full of mercy ; but that is a suggestion that is peculiarly human. Mercy and justice have nothing in common. Justice has no feelings. Effect follows cause ; punishment follows sin. Justice merely sees that the proper punishment ensues sin. That is—so we are told by priests of the Christian Churches—why we are all to go to Hell if we do not believe, for God's justice must punish us for what Adam did. But mercy would temper and alter justice ; it would plead mitigation ; it would evoke things non-just, seek to evade justice, plead for a punishment that was not just.

Human beings depend on mercy. They could not live with justice. They have to make laws, and they talk of "justice," of course ; but, being weak and



frail, they must mix their "justice" with compassion and mercy. In Heaven, where there is perfect justice, there can obviously be no mercy.

God, being therefore perfectly just, is not disturbed by sentimental wailings or pleadings, or prayers of any kind. If he were once turned from his purpose, he would cease to be just. So if the decree after the affair in the Garden of Eden was that the whole human race should die—and the priests of the Christian Churches who claim to have God's Word say that was the decree—it means that God, some time, in his infinite justice (one must be careful to avoid the careless writing of sentimental people who very frequently talk of so impossible a thing as "infinite mercy" !), decided there was a way to alter the manner of justice, and, of course, without in any way impairing it.

We are adopting the argument of the priests, and the reader will feel at every sentence that the tale of the priests is of the kind that slashes common sense.

The priests say that God loves all the races of mankind alike, that he wants all of us to be saved, and it was because he so loved the world—the world, remember, not the Jews or the Samaritans or Romans or English—that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

It does not get rid of the fact that belief is a mental abnormality, a sort of logical harelip, and that the only thing an honest man can do in all matters is to use his reason. If his reason tells him that the tale he has been told is incredible, he will be incapable of believing, and therefore he will be damned for having common sense, which is the very thing that distinguishes him from the beasts of the field.

When we remember that the priest has said many things that are false, which the priests themselves have

subsequently recognized as false ; that it was priests who declared God said, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and proceeded to torture poor innocent human beings by the thousand, we feel fairly confident that reason is a better guide than the priest, and that a foolish belief can really be of no use to anybody.

We will, however, pursue the religious argument.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for all mankind. We have been told again and again that everybody is included in this act of grace or manifestation of God's justice. God makes no difference between Gentile and Jew, black and white, circumcised and uncircumcised. It was his object in sending his only Son on earth to let the whole world be saved. If men do not believe, it is their own fault, say the priests.

The first man appeared some hundreds of thousands of years before Christ ; what happened to all the human beings who died before Christ came ? They could not believe. Were they damned ? The priests cannot invent human ways-out. They say they have the Word of God, which has been given to man for his guidance. Now it does not say in the Bible that if a man uses his reason, and comes to the conclusion that he cannot believe what he has been told by a priest, or that he never heard the story at all, that it does not matter. So we are driven to the conclusion that if it is true—if *it is true*—that except a man believes on the Lord Jesus Christ he cannot be saved, then it was a calamity of the most tragic order for people to be born before Christ. They had no chance to believe. According to the teaching of the Church, they are in Hell.

But nobody with a grain of common sense does believe that those millions of millions of human beings are in Hell-fire because they did not believe

something they could not believe. No decent-minded clergyman in the Church of England could believe such a hideous doctrine. The Roman Catholic priest is bound in such narrow fetters that one is not sure whether he is allowed to escape the letter of his teaching and now and again use his reason.

But, we shall be told, after Christ did appear all was changed. Everybody became responsible for his belief; therefore, every one since the coming of Christ has had a chance of being saved, and if any one has refused salvation by refusing to believe it is his or her fault.

That will not do. Millions upon millions of human beings know nothing of Christ even to-day. They have never heard his name. If their damnation comes from the sin of Adam, and they do not take the only course that priests say must be taken for salvation, then they must "be damned everlastingly," as bishops, priests, and deacons tell us.

Men have no right to invent another way of escape still, just because they feel sentimental in the matter. God is not mocked. His word is not to be questioned. The priest says he understands that word perfectly, and he has told us clearly and explicitly what the consequence of not believing in Jesus is.

The priestly argument does not grip us so far with its reasonableness. We will pursue it.

Jesus paid our debts by his sacrifice. He died to save us. Without sacrifice there is no remission of sins. Christ suffered for us. Peter said his sufferings had been foretold; so it was part of the divine plan that Christ should die. And there is Christ's own statement: "For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins." And in the epistle to the Hebrews it says "that he [Jesus] by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Mark says (x, 45): "For

even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

A reflection is here borne on us. Suppose Christ had not been crucified, would his life in that case *not* have been a ransom for many? The priests cannot interpret the word of God as they will, but as they must, and the answer is presumably No. We put this question because we must see clearly that if Jesus came on earth to die for us, as we are told by the priests, then those people who played their part by putting Jesus to death were doing what God meant them to do; they were doing something—whether good or ill for themselves—which, according to the priests, was of priceless value to the rest of the human race. They were unconsciously the greatest benefactors mankind has known, and outside every church there surely ought to be raised statues to Pontius Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas, and the Jewish mob.

The logic of the priest seems to lead to the destruction of sanity.

Now let us look at the plan as a whole. This coming of the Son of God to save mankind was the most colossal event in the history of the world. God had decided, some hundreds of thousands of years after the first man had sinned, that the time was ripe for the salvation of the rest of the world.

This part of the priestly story troubles us. We are told that the salvation of the whole world was envisaged; we are told that God meant to save the Hindoo, the Chinese, the Mongol, the American Indian, the Polynesian, the ancient Briton, and all the other races that peopled the earth, for he loves all his children alike. Therefore, we should say, he would give them all the same chance of salvation. If the story is true, all the varied peoples of this sinful world would have had an equal chance to learn of the wonderful salva-

tion that was coming to poor, damned humanity. God, in his infinite power, could do anything he wished. And we may be sure of this, that if the Creator of the Universe had seen fit to plan all this it would have been a godlike plan ; it would have been one that would have really let men know that Jesus was the Son of God, and that he had come on earth to die so that men might at last find salvation. The maker of the stars in their courses, he who set in motion the amazing laws which we are slowly discovering with ever-renewing wonder, would have shown his love for the human race in a manner befitting his might, majesty, and dominion, if the tale that the priest tells is true. But if the plan were to let people know that at last the Son of God had come to earth as men's saviour, then there has not been a more ghastly failure in this world's story.

The priest fails utterly when he drags the Almighty into this tale.

Jesus was born of a small, narrow-minded race. Even when he started preaching he expressly said he was not sent save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He came in such a way that the people who saw him daily and knew him well did not believe he was the Son of God ; only a few ignorant fisher-folk, a harlot, a publican, and a few humble people believed in him at all. And outside his own narrow circle not a soul *knew* that Jesus was the Son of God, and that he had come on earth to die for us, and that it was necessary for men to believe that if they would escape damnation !

If one compares the plan with the execution, one sees at once that a government official could have got a better result.

The story of this pretended plan on the part of the Almighty is another of those feeble concoctions of the priestly mind. Zealous in ceremony, priests have failed

utterly in truth ; they never thought of the implication of their tale, any more than they did when they said God inspired all the stupid, heathenish, savage, bestial, childish, extravagant things recorded in the Old Testament. This plan was a failure, and God does not fail !

Think of the things the writers say were to impress the people with the truth of the wonderful event. Stars shone ; there was a voice from Heaven to tell people that here was God's Son ; miracles were worked ; Christ rose from the dead ; dead people came to life. With such wonderful occurrences the wisest as well as the shallowest could have been convinced. Yet the coming of Jesus as the Son of God, designed as a plan to save the world, has been a phenomenal failure !

The coming of Jesus as a Saviour happened nearly two thousand years ago, and the news has not got to half the peoples on the earth yet !

If men like Mr. Henry Ford, the late Lord Leverhulme, or Lord Beaverbrook had had the task of letting mankind know they were to go to Hell because Adam sinned, but that the Son of God was coming to earth so that whosoever believed in him should not perish but have everlasting life, they would have made a much better job of the task than was made. Every country would have been prepared. Jesus was on earth for at least thirty years before the fateful end, and during that time all the power of Heaven—so the old writers and the present-day priests pretend—was at the disposal of those who would let the people of the world know the momentous thing that was happening. We can imagine the astounding use that could have been made of the star in the East and the angels singing at night. That incident alone, if well contrived, should have arrested the attention of millions. Yet apparently only a few shepherds were permitted

to hear the angel who spoke and the others who sang. If these angels came to help to convince the world, it seems a pity they were seen by only a few shepherds ; and, oddly enough, Mark never heard of them. Neither did Matthew. Or John. Matthew, Mark, nor John ever caught the faintest echoes of that angelic voice and song !

During Christ's life he never clearly told the people he was the Son of God, who had come on earth to die for our sins, and that if they would be saved they must put him to death and believe in him. When examined reasonably, this story of a god coming to earth must surely be interpreted as one of the most pathetically managed things that have ever occurred. Even the rending of the veil of the temple after Christ died, or his resurrection, or the saints who had been dead and came to life again, seem to have had no effect in Jerusalem among the Jews, for they did not even believe ; and not a hint of these events travelled to the outside world at the time !

A failure !

But a God does not fail. Men fail as often as they fancy. They fail in word and deed, and the sad thing is men have failed most in telling the truth and in using their reason.

The tale that God prepared this momentous plan, with all this elaborate setting, is so obviously the invention of strangely- and ancient-minded men that, if analysed, it fails to-day to carry conviction. One cannot really believe it. It stands no test. God said none of these things, worked none of these wonders, arranged no plan such as the priests preach. The sun is as clear as the religious vision is dim, dull, and distorted. And God is greater than the sun. When we have a message from the Almighty we shall know it ; we shall not be able to riddle it with argument.

We hope the reader grasps all the time that we are contesting the dogmas and doctrines of the priests. They drag God into their tales of terror as the curious folk of old said, "Thus saith the Lord"; and we know, if we use our reason, that what the priests say about God is untrue, and we refuse to accept any statement that makes the Creator of the universe the familiar friend of licentious men, a petulant creature who says he is weary of repenting, a being who delights in cruelty and bloodshed, unjust, illogical, and a blunderer.

We are not impressed even if the priest points out that these things are in the Bible. We reply that the Bible was written by frail, ignorant men, and that a great quantity of what those men wrote is not only lacking in accuracy but is blasphemous, and that no man who loves truth and uses his reason ought to preach or propagate it.

The man at the hearth will have no difficulty if he will be honest and use his common sense. If some one presented us with a play that was ill conceived, ill planned, ill written, without any hint of poetry or philosophy or insight into life, without a memorable phrase and with characters of dust and ashes, and said it was by Shakespeare, we should refuse to accept the information till we knew what authority the presenter had for what he said. If a presumed Shaw play came to us without wit or ideas, badly spelt, ungrammatically written, and without at least one long speech in it and a few healthy gibes, we should certainly say it was not by George Bernard Shaw. If a story written like the most hectic of Miss Victoria Cross's novels were presented to the world as by Charles Dickens, we should use our critical sense and say somebody had blundered.

We are not afraid to take this common-sense attitude in relation to all walks of life; why should we tremble



and nod our heads acquiescently before mumbling priests, who offer us absurdities?

If people would use their reason and cease to believe what was said by them of old time, and is repeated by people who think it wrong to use common sense when they are told anything, the world would benefit, because truth would supplant lies, courage would usurp cowardice, and reason would reign instead of folly.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE VIRGIN BIRTH—THE CHRISTIANS AFTER CHRIST'S  
DEATH—MYTHS—MITHRAISM—HOW THE CHRIS-  
TIAN GOT HOLD OF THE IDEA OF THE VIRGIN  
BIRTH—GODS BORN OF VIRGINS—THE GOSPELS

CHRIST is said to be god and man, or god in human flesh, and to have been born of a virgin.

It is a strange creed.

Reason, applying itself to this problem, is singularly unsatisfied. A god masquerading as a man..... How many gods are there?.....And why?

Questions like these arise, and there is no comforting response.

This theory that mankind was damned because of Adam knowing his wife or eating an apple is so unsatisfying that we make no apology for referring to it now and again, as it lets us see the mentality that works out and adorns a religion with foolish tassels. We don't believe in this theory of the "fall." It was invented by priests in the days of their imaginings. We see the difficulty the priests have in getting rid of the doctrine, because without it they do not know how to account for a god coming on earth as a man to die. We feel we need a great deal of evidence and argument when we are told that the man Jesus was a god, and that his mother was a virgin. As children we accepted the story, but it sounds incredible now.

Jesus a *god*.....

Do Christians weigh what that implies? We know most of them accept the statement without making the

slightest attempt to investigate its truth. It is an astounding statement. How did this idea get abroad? Who first *knew* it as a fact and promulgated it? This question must arise in the mind of any honest seeker after truth. It is essential in the interests of truth that we should learn how anybody *discovered* the fact that Jesus was a god. Moreover, we must probe diligently into the evidence to see if what is alleged is reasonable.

So that the reader may have a clear understanding of the matter, we will first explain why it was that these weird ideas were enunciated by the priests.

We know that after the death of Jesus the Jews in Jerusalem did not believe he was a god, or that he was the Messiah. He had lived among them; he had been tried before them; and when he was dead and buried they went on living as if Christ's life and death were no more than the life and death of John the Baptist or of a malefactor on a cross.

For a great many years the Christians—that is, those who treasured Christ's memory and called themselves his followers—waited for him to come again. That was their simple creed. But he did not come again. In their worship they not only continued to read the old Jewish scriptures and keep the old Jewish feasts, but they also copied and assimilated—as we have seen in the previous chapter—pagan ceremonies and pagan ideas.

Roman power was dominant at that time, and the Christians took many of their notions and their observances from the Romans, who had as their religion—among others—Mithraism.

Mithraism was sun- or fertility-worship. It came from Persia originally, and had been brought to Rome by the Cilician pirates conquered by Pompey. Mithras was the god of the sky, the protector of truth, and the enemy of error and falsehood. It was an

older religion than Christianity, and the two had many things in common. Both had legends about the flood and the ark, and shepherds with gifts and adoration. In both religions were the "doctrines of Heaven and Hell, of primitive revelation, of the mediation of the Logos emanating from the divine, the atoning sacrifice, the constant warfare between good and evil and the final triumph of the former, the immortality of the soul, the last judgment, the resurrection of the flesh, and the fiery destruction of the universe" (*Ency. Brit.* : "Mithras").

That the Christians had got hold of the myths that were floating about is evident from the way these myths were worked into the gospels. The Greeks had poured from their golden bowls of wisdom enough beauty and thought to set up half-a-dozen creeds. The Stoics and the Epicureans had flung out philosophy with a lavish hand. But the people cried for gods as they had done to Aaron, and so gods were given them.

There were many gods in the first centuries of Christianity, but the principal rival of Christ was Mithras ; and it is interesting to speculate on what would have been the difference to the world if the Romans had not lost Dacia. Men have prayed to the gods in the hour of battle ; but it would have been far more reasonable if the gods had prayed to men.

Mithras was defeated because the soldiers who worshipped him were defeated. A series of fortunate Roman generals would have probably set up cathedrals to Mithras in a Mithraic England. But the sword decided otherwise—not a priest or a god.

That is interesting in itself ; but it is even more interesting when we see how the new religion of Christianity took booty from the defeated god. Mithras was called "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" ; he was called "the

Light of the World"; his birthday was December 25—the Christians borrowed that as the date of the birthday of Jesus, for nobody knows when Jesus was born. Mithras's day was the first day of the week, very properly called Sunday, and the Christians turned their backs on Jehovah, who had said, "the *seventh* day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God"—for they ceased to regard the seventh day, which is the Sabbath et cetera, and made Mithras's day the day to be kept holy. And they all turn to the East—greeting the Sun! When Mithras was born, wise men called Magi visited him, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There was a mine of lore in Mithraism for Christians to delve into.

Legends and myths of sun-gods and fertility-gods were familiar to the Christians as they were to the old Hebrews, and, like Molière, they took what was useful wherever they found it.

The three kings, for instance, who saw the star in the East are very likely the three stars in the belt of Orion, and the star in the East was Sirius. All this is from the Egyptians, and is mingled with sun worship; but it went into the Christian creed in those days because it was good religious stock, generally accepted, and likely to make a creed welcome, like a good orchestra or familiar tunes.

If we keep before us the fact that sun-myths were the most widely spread and the most generally accepted, we shall understand many things in the New Testament that may have been a sore perplexity to us before. Mr. J. M. Robertson maintains that Jesus is not a historical person at all, and that Christianity has appropriated these myths, mostly of the sun-god. That the Christians assimilated a number of the sun-god myths is undeniable.

The Chaldeans and the Egyptians observed the heavens, but there seems to have been little astro-

nomical observation by the Hebrews. The signs of the Zodiac have had a great influence in religion, and supply the keys to much that would otherwise be unintelligible. It was the sun's journey round the earth (as the ancients thought) which provided the Jews with the nucleus of many of their myths. The sun-worshippers imagined the sun to be born on December 25 and to pass through a trying time, as winter is. At the vernal equinox the sun "passes over" into summer; and the Jews have their passover feast at the time of the vernal equinox. Joshua, Samson, and Jonah were sun-gods. It is probable that Abram, Moses, and Joseph were mythical beings. These old myths were in the marrow of the Jews, and they did not get rid of them all at once, because they regarded Jesus as the Messiah; they were all the more ready to use them, because they were eager to use anything to allure the people when they had to compete with Mithraism.

That Christianity and Mithraism were alike in many of their rites may be shown from the following quotations:—

"The Devil, whose business it is to prevent the truth, mimics the exact circumstances of the Divine Sacraments in the mysteries of idols. He himself baptises same, that is to say, his believers and followers; he promises forgiveness of sins from the sacred fount, and thereby initiates them into the Religion of Mithras; thus he marks on the forehead his own soldiers; there he celebrates the oblation of bread; he brings in the symbol of the resurrection, and wins the crown with the sword" (Tertullian).

Justin Martyr makes it clearer: "The apostles, in the commentaries written by themselves, which we call gospels, have delivered down to us how that Jesus thus commanded them: 'He having taken bread,

after that He had given thanks, said, Do this in commemoration of me : this is my body : also, having taken the cup and returned thanks, He said, This is my blood ' ; and delivered it unto them alone. Which things the evil spirits have taught to be done out of memory in the mysteries and ministrations of Mithras." That is how the old Christian father wishes to make people believe that what Christians do is right, but that the same thing done by Mithraists (long before Christians did it) was of the devil !

And there was the great Augustine, who wrote this : " Again, in that I said, ' This in our time the Christian religion, which to know and also follow is most sure and certain salvation ' ; it is affirmed in regard to this name, not in regard to the sacred thing itself to which the name belongs. For the sacred thing *which is now called the Christian religion existed in ancient times*, nor indeed was it absent from the beginning of the human race until the Christ Himself came in the flesh, *whence the true religion, which already existed, came to be called ' the Christian. '* So when after His resurrection and ascension to heaven the Apostles began to preach and many believed, it was thus written, ' The followers were first called Christians at Antioch. ' Therefore I said, ' This is in our time the Christian religion, ' *not because it did not exist in earlier times, but as having in later times received this particular name.*" (See *Our Sun-God*, by J. D. Parsons.) The italics are ours.

Chrishna was supposed to be a god in human form. Six hundred years before Christ was born his praises were sung in the Mahabharata. Chrishna was born of a chaste virgin.

Buddha was born of the Virgin Maya or Mary ! She conceived by the Holy Ghost. Buddha left Heaven to be the redeemer of mankind. Angels called to the people on earth when he was born.

Lao-tsze was also born of a virgin.

Horus in Egypt was born of the Virgin Isis.

Even our old acquaintance Nebuchadnezzar, who during his checkered career behaved now and then in very ungodlike fashion, had this inscription: "I am Nabu-Kuder-user.....the first-born son of Nebupal-user, King of Babylon. The god *Bel* himself created me, the god *Marduk* engendered me and deposited himself the germ of my life in the womb of my mother."

Hercules was the son of Jupiter by a mortal mother.

So was Bacchus.

So was Amphion.

So was Perseus.

These creatures born of virgins or begotten by gods were so common that Justin Martyr, in writing to the Emperor Adrian, said: "By declaring the Logos, the first begotten of God, our Master, Jesus Christ, to be born of a virgin, without any human mixture, we say no more in this than what you say of those whom you style the Sons of Jove.....As to the Son of God, called Jesus, should we allow him to be nothing more than man, yet the title of 'the Son of God' is very justifiable, upon the account of his wisdom, considering that you have your Mercury in worship under the title of the word, a messenger of God.....as to Jesus being born of a virgin, you have your Perseus to balance that."

When the holy father writes like that, we cannot be expected to think more of Christian tales than of pagan ones. "This *balances* that." "They are on the same footing." It does not help to convince, though it may have soothed critical pagans.

The list of people who have been born of gods or of virgin mothers is far too long to quote. It includes Alexander the Great, Ptolemy, and Plato.



The following is from Gerald Massey's *The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ* :—

“The mythical Messiah was always born of a virgin mother—a factor unknown in natural phenomena, and one that cannot be historical ; one that can be explained only by means of a Mythos, and those conditions of primitive sociology which are mirrored in mythology and preserved in theology.

“Four consecutive scenes are found portrayed upon the innermost walls of the *Holy of Holies* in the Temple of Luxor, which was built by Amenhept III, a Pharaoh of the seventeenth dynasty. The first scene on the left hand shows the God Taht, the Lunar Mercury, the Annunciator of the Gods, in the act of hailing the Virgin Queen, and announcing to her that she is to give birth to the coming son. In the next scene the God Kneph (in conjunction with Hathor) gives the new life. This is the Holy Ghost or Spirit that causes the Immaculate Conception, Kneph being the Spirit by name in Egyptian. The natural effects are made apparent in the virgin's swelling form.....

“These scenes, which were mythical in Egypt, have been copied or reproduced as historical in the canonical Gospels, where they stand like four cornerstones to the Historic Structure, and prove that the foundations are mythical.”

Similar ideas have spread as far as Mexico, Yucatan, Nicaragua, Peru, Guatemala ; among the Iroquois, the Algonquins, and the Ojibways.

So, in examining the case of Jesus, we are not for the first time coming upon a virgin giving birth to a child or a god being born of woman. But the theory demands attention, for, if it is not true, it puts Christianity, so far as its greatest claim is concerned, on a level with the religion of the Ojibways.

It is admitted by all critics, Christian and others,

that Mark's gospel is the oldest of the synoptics. We do not know the precise date when any of the gospels were written, but the accepted theory is that Mark's appeared before Matthew's, Luke's, or John's.

Let us apply our common sense to this question of the Virgin Mary giving birth to a child. The theory is that three Gods, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, decided that one of them should come to earth as a man. The Christian says the Holy Ghost impregnated Mary, and as a consequence Jesus was born, who was a god.

We know how children are conceived and born. If the seed of the male does not join with that of the female, there will be no child. Therefore the Holy Ghost was human ; the Holy Ghost, at the time Mary conceived, must have had human qualities. There are things physical as well as things spiritual, and the birth of a child is a physical thing. We have never seen any mention of the incarnation of the Holy Ghost, but the story demands it.

Now, we must always remember that the Christian maintains the Son is co-eternal with the Father and with the Holy Ghost. Therefore the Son existed at the time Mary conceived. He was somewhere. Where was he? God is God, whether in Heaven or on earth or in the womb of a woman. Gods cannot destroy their identities. If God the Son came forth as the child Jesus from the womb of Mary, it was obviously because he projected himself somehow at some time into her womb.

But the Christians would have us believe that a god was actually *conceived* when the Holy Ghost impregnated Mary, and that is manifestly absurd, for an eternal God cannot have had a beginning only about two thousand years ago.

We can imagine an Almighty God doing wonderful things, but this story of the Holy Ghost begetting

a god does not carry conviction. And if the Christian should suggest that Christ, as a god, entered into the womb of the Virgin Mary, and that the story of her *conception* by the Holy Ghost is not true and ought not to be in the creed, being false and of no moral or intellectual value, we are prompted to ask the Christian how he knows.

We candidly confess that it is conceivable that an almighty god might, in his inscrutable wisdom, enter into a woman so as to be "born" as an infant, but we cannot accept the story on some man's word. We have heard it of lots of people. Almost all religions have this tale of a god being born of a virgin, and the curious thing is that the Christian himself thinks it incredible—except when it refers to Christ! We find his tale equally incredible, and we think that is the only conclusion common sense can arrive at. It is a most improbable story; it runs counter to all human experience; it was a tale believed by ignorant people of old and introduced into nearly all religions. It is the myth that has been handed on from age to age, and it is really time that reasonable people ceased to carry this unintellectual and useless baggage. What we refuse to accept from Ojibways we need not swallow from the Christians.

Why do the Christians believe the story? We know, unfortunately, that we are made to believe when we are young; and some never find the time or the courage to inquire into the reasonableness of their belief.

This theory of the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ is set out in the creed, and Christians will say they find justification for it in the Bible. But if the Bible is the work of men, as we contend, then what is in the Bible is interesting, but not necessarily evidence, and is certainly not convincing.

If it is true that Mary as a virgin "conceived of the

Holy Ghost," why is the fact not mentioned in Mark's gospel? The priest says Mark's gospel was inspired by God. Then God did not tell or inspire Mark about the birth of Christ? Not a hint. Of course, if the gospel according to St. Mark is a compilation by a man like unto ourselves, we understand it thoroughly. He merely wanted to write a plain account of the life and doings of Jesus, and this embroidering myth of the virgin birth did not seem to him to be the kind of thing he need drag into his narrative. Matthew and Luke had other MSS. to copy from; or they had motives to write which did not move Mark; or they felt that no religion could possibly hope to succeed that had no story of a god born of a virgin; or, as is probable, Matthew wanted to persuade the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and took the best way he could to achieve that end—viz., by writing such things as he thought would please and convince them.

Matthew says that Joseph discovered his espoused was with child before they were married. Joseph was naturally annoyed, as any engaged man ought to be in such circumstances. But an angel appeared unto him and told him that his "wife" Mary had conceived by the Holy Ghost!

This is not an ordinary story. Either it is true or false. It appears in a book called the Word of God, and priests say it is true. If such an event happened to-day, the story of it would never die. The whole earth would ring with it. And Saint Mark never heard of it! God did not inspire him to write one line about it! Luke somehow got a different version; but John also never heard of it, though the MSS. of Matthew and Luke were there for him to copy!

Merely using our common sense, we must ask how Matthew and Luke knew of this story, which was apparently unknown to Mark and scorned by John. Only three people could have told this story—Jesus,

Mary, and Joseph. And there is not a word in any of the gospels where Jesus, Mary, or Joseph gives the slightest hint that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost when his mother was a virgin.

On the contrary. Luke says: "Now *his parents* went to Jerusalem," etc. (ii, 41). Mary says: "Thy father and I....." (Luke ii, 48). "And his family thought Jesus mad" (Mark iii, 21 ; see also John vii, 5).

A woman who has conceived of the Holy Ghost, and brought a god into the world, does not behave like that. But a woman who has given birth in the ordinary way to a child who subsequently behaves like a prophet is quite likely to think him mad.

And there is one point that appears disturbing in a book which priests tell us is inspired. Matthew has assured us that the real father of Jesus is the Holy Ghost. But he wants to make out that Jesus is the Messiah, and, as the Messiah had to be of the seed of David, Matthew naturally provided a proper Messianic pedigree, and he originally ended with these pregnant words: "And *Joseph begat Jesus*, who is called Christ." Joseph begat Jesus, after all!

The present reading has been written by one of those facile redactors. (See *Myth, Magic, and Morals*, by F. C. Conybeare ; p. 188.)

Christ cannot have been of the seed of David if the Holy Ghost was his father. The Holy Ghost cannot have been his father if "Joseph begat Jesus."

These two theories are contradictory. A child cannot have two fathers.

There is another point. In Luke (ii, 22) it says: "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished....."

This is the interpretation of "purification": "If a woman have conceived seed and born a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days" (*Leviticus* xii, 2).

And to this day priests keep up their preposterous pretence, and women maintain their shameful subservience, when the ceremony of "churching" is performed.

Now, if Jesus were born by the Holy Ghost of a virgin, there could possibly be nothing but insult to God in going to a priest to be *purified*.

But Mary went !

The Roman Catholics have added an extra strain to the credulity of their followers by declaring Mary herself to have been born immaculate. All the more reason, then, why she should not have gone to the priest to be purified.

But she went.

Reason cannot be stamped on. This tale of the virgin birth is so obviously one concocted in ignorance, propagated in ignorance, and accepted blindly that to-day leading men in the Church no longer hold out any hope of persuading sane people to believe it.

J. Estlin Carpenter, lecturer on the History of Religion at Manchester College, Oxford, in *The Bible in the Nineteenth Century*, says : " The stories of the Virgin Birth are not only, however, inconsistent with each other, with the genealogies, and with the tenor of the rest of the Evangelic representations ; they are also really incompatible with the meaning of the divine words at the Baptism " (p. 488). " In truth, however, it is frankly recognized that this doctrine does not really rest upon historic evidence " (p. 493). And Harnack says : " It is one of the best established results of history that the clause, ' Born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary,' does not belong to the earliest gospel teaching " (*Nineteenth Century*, July, 1893).

The following excerpts are from the article on " Mary " in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* : " We find expressions used by him [Jesus] which seem directly

to exclude the idea of a virgin birth.....Whole sections of the first two chapters of Luke bear witness against the virgin birth.....The whole of Luke ii, accordingly, not only knows nothing of the virgin birth, but rests upon the opposite presupposition.....The alternatives before us, therefore, are either to suppose that the author of the chapter as a whole has put a wholly inappropriate utterance into Mary's mouth, or to assume that in vv. 30-33 an unsupernatural birth—a possible interpretation—is actually intended, and then in v. 34f a supernatural birth has been substituted for it by another hand, and accordingly that 'Son of God' (v. 35) is to be taken in a physical sense, otherwise than the 'Son of the highest' in v. 32. It is well worth noticing that Bernh. Weiss, on account of this difference, takes the words of i, 35c, to be an addition made by the redactor to his source. The same consideration must, however, be extended to i, 34f, in which case the virgin birth disappears from the source altogether.....The Church assigns the highest value to the doctrine of the virgin birth. (a) Why it did so may be best seen perhaps in Justin. He declares, for example (*Apol.* i, 54, or *Dial.* 70), that the myths regarding the multitude of sons of gods, and especially the myth regarding the virgin's son Perseus, had been invented by the demons to rob the manifestation of Jesus the true Son of God of its importance.....Such arguments may have impressed many people who heard them at that time; but they also show to what a level Jesus can be (not raised but) lowered by the doctrine of his virgin birth."

So we come to the inevitable conclusion that the tale of the virgin birth of Jesus is one borrowed by credulous people from pagan religions; that it is not true, and ought not to be believed. And we find this view is that of Christians of intellectual distinction.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DIVINITY OF JESUS—THE TESTIMONY FROM THE GOSPELS—THE LORD'S PRAYER AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—DIFFERENT IDEAS OF GODHOOD

Now let us inquire into the theory that Jesus was a god.

It is certain that if we had not been told this authoritatively when we were young we should not have believed it. In childhood we accept the wonderful without question, and in the early days of Christianity people were in their religious childhood.

For hundreds of years after Christ died the Christians had no settled creed or definitely "inspired" books. Creed and Bible were beaten out of time and circumstance, like swords and ploughshares, temples and gods. They were all the work of men. Not once in the whole history of Christianity can any one say, "That indubitably was spoken by a god" or "That unquestionably was done by a god." If the Creator of the universe had wished mankind to know what had to be believed, men would have had the message with divine clarity. God is not muddled. Christians have wrestled and disputed and fought over Christian doctrines from the birth of Christianity until now, and they have produced a human creed conceived by man, begotten with all human imperfections.

The doctrine of Christ's divinity was thrashed out after hundreds of years of argument. It comes to believers now as a sort of settled thing, but for centuries after the death of Jesus men who called



themselves Christians were putting forward theories, refuting others, and generally squabbling over what is now considered to be fundamental in Christianity.

Common sense would say at once that if Jesus were a god people must have known it when he was alive. What a man says and does is human ; what a god says and does is divine. In the world's history we can find no trace whatever of a god appearing on the earth and conversing with men. The wise have dealt with the foolish, the cultured have mingled with the savage ; but nobody has ever come forward with evidence, that a reasonable person could accept, to persuade us that a god lived with men.

Yet the tales of gods living on earth are legion. The Pharaohs were gods. They behaved like men, and no Christian can be found foolish enough to think that any Pharaoh was a god. Men have made gods very easily. It is obvious that if the early Christians wished to make headway at all they had to declare Jesus a god. And their credulous minds would believe what was credulous currency in those days.

"The view that unusual persons were god-begotten was undoubtedly universal in the early Semitic world. It lingered in an attenuated form down to the beginning of the Christian era. Philo Judæus declares that Zipporah was found by Moses 'pregnant by no mortal'; Isaac was 'not the result of generation, but the shaping of the unbegotten'; Samuel was 'born of a human mother' who 'became pregnant after receiving divine seed'; Tamar was 'pregnant through divine seed'" (*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, "Incarnation").

The idea of some one like a human creature walking, talking, eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking being a god is an idea that offends our common sense. The idea, having been drilled into childish minds, is tolerated and accepted by people when they grow

older, just as all manner of strange superstitions are given a certain credence by the unreflecting. But it is against all human experience. It is as unacceptable as a miracle.

Before we could believe the story of any miracle we should require overwhelming evidence. Those who believe without evidence are unworthy citizens of a thinking and reasonable world.

We have plenty of evidence to show that in the days of Jesus men believed all manner of things that no intelligent person could accept now. We know that the idea of a god living on earth as a man was common, that it was the pith of many religions, and provoked neither reflection nor criticism. But the first duty of men to-day is to think. We do ourselves wrong, and the race wrong, when we swallow the incredible because foolish people of old swallowed it.

We know nothing of the nature of God. The Almighty, in his inscrutable wisdom, has never revealed himself personally to any human being. Many people have written of God familiarly and blasphemously; many people have told tales of the Almighty they would be ashamed to tell of Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, or Lord Oxford. The Bible, for instance, harvests sheaves of such writings and such tales. But it is the duty of honest men to repudiate them.

The idea of God fills us with awe. Who and what is the being who has made the universe? Even the wise man's answer is but a string of words. The religious man answers the question far too frequently like a glib and scandalous valet, whispering licentious tales and boasting of his master's wealth.

We might premise, without irreverence or foolishness, that God, if he spoke to men, would speak like a god; that if he lived with men he would live like a god; that if he had something to tell men it would

be divine and be told divinely.<sup>1</sup> We should surely note the difference between a god and a man.

Yet Jesus, till he was thirty years of age, did nothing and said nothing that lifted him out of the ruck of simple Galileans. But if he was a god he was a god from the day of his birth to the day of his death. Yet it is suggested that Jesus, being a god with a tremendous message for the whole of the human race, said nothing and did nothing for thirty years! We are told he came on earth with a mission charged with the most momentous consequences for all mankind, and yet the tales we have of his childhood merely show us some one behaving like a boy who had seen a magician; and, as the Christians did not wish this view to be propagated, they shrewdly decided that the "Gospel of Thomas," in which these stories of Christ's boyhood appear, should be considered non-canonical and dropped!

Jesus never at any time said he was a god. Surely that is remarkable. If he were a god, why suppress the news? Was it not something we had to know according to Christian teaching? Jesus never said he was a god because he was a man.

Years after he was dead the doctrine that he was divine was elaborated; and it was quite in keeping with the mentality of the early Christians. But it was also part of their mentality to believe in demons. Intellectual people to-day do not believe in demons. Jesus believed in them. Jesus believed that Jonah was in the whale's belly, and that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. A god does not believe what is false.

We can all understand primitive people trying to describe a god. The old Hebrews did it frequently, and made a horrible mess of it. The Christians took hundreds of years to line and colour their portrait, and they give to people of discernment crude, botched, illogical human craftsmanship. They mix the thauma-

turgic, wonderful, simple old ideas, and gain credence by authority.

The figure of Jesus has been touched and retouched. It is certain that tales of him grew with the passing of years. As doctrines were elaborated, so men wrote of him; and they were elaborated only after much argument. But before we see how these views of Christ changed we can apply our common sense to certain incidents in his life.

A man went to Jesus and called him "Good master." Jesus replied: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one: that is, God."

If Jesus were God, he could not have said that. An exalted man, a spiritually-minded man, filled with a passion for the big as opposed to the petty, austere, pious, and humble, would naturally say that. But God is God. God neither could nor would deny his goodness.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke ii, 52).

If Jesus were a god, that phrase is preposterous. Gods do not "increase in wisdom" nor in "favour" with their co-equal and co-eternal gods.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, with his brothers, declared he was mad!

A mother, having given birth to a child, and seen him grow up contemplative, dreamy, finely-minded but different from the usual run of men, apt to speak out unconventionally and do strange things, might easily describe him as "mad." But not if he were a god; not if she had "conceived of the Holy Ghost." If she had had any idea of the god-idea attaching to her son, she would have pondered many things in her heart before she called him mad.

We are gravely informed that when Jesus went among his own countrymen "he could do there no mighty work."

That could not apply to God. God is omnipotent. He does not lose his power because he puts on the clothes of a man. If Jesus were a god, then he would have been able to do "mighty work" whenever and wherever he wished.

"And he sighed deeply in his spirit and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark viii, 12).

The Pharisees had been asking Jesus for a sign from heaven. The priest pooh-poohs this inquiry of the Pharisees, but we are fully in sympathy with the questioners. Why should not a sign be given? We have been told that angels sang for the benefit of shepherds and their flocks; we have been told that the heavens opened, and that a voice came from above, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Considering that the Father and the Son are said to be co-eternal and co-equal together, there is a note of the patronizing in that "in whom I am well pleased" which gives us that touch of man so common in his tales of God. One god does not hand out a testimonial to another god.

There was obviously no objection to signs. And when we are told that the whole purpose of Christ's coming on earth was to let people know that he was God, who had come to save the whole world, it strikes us that a sign of some convincing sort was just what was wanted. If somebody came to-day on the earth and declared himself to be Moses or Elias or the Messiah, all sensible people would ask him for evidence that he spoke the truth. There is nothing irreverent in that, but everything that is eminently sensible. We only want to know the truth. God knows all our frailties, and the number of times we have been taken in by charlatans and by misleading and misled priests. He has given us reason to guide

us, and no other guide. We are full of sympathy with these inquiring Pharisees. Moreover, we are convinced that, if the thesis of the Christians is true that Christ was God, who came on earth so that men might escape damnation by believing it, there would have been most wonderful signs.

But note the attitude of Jesus : " He sighed deeply." Gods do not sigh. Sighing is human ; it suggests mental or spiritual weariness. We have met human beings who have had much cause for sighing, and have refused to do it. It is a phrase that gives us the striving, earnest preacher disappointed because some will not accept his message. We deeply sympathize ; but we must note that this sighing betrays the man.

Further, if we read that passage carefully, we come to the conclusion that what Jesus said does not harmonize with other passages in the Word of God that tell us of signs. Surely it was a sign when the angels sang by night? Was it not a sign when the voice came from heaven? In our view, it was a wonderful sign. We are also told of many miracles—of a transfiguration, resurrection, ascension.

Jesus had been preaching his simple gospel, telling people to be good to one another, to cease to do evil, to learn to do good, to seek peace and ensue it ; and these Pharisees came to him and asked him for a sign from heaven to convince them that he was somebody out of the ordinary. And he could not give them one. He was right to tell them in the circumstances that no sign should be given them. Men cannot give signs from heaven. Men have to do with reason, and the only sign the Pharisees deserved—as it is the only sign all men deserve—is reason. These Pharisees were still dwelling with the signs of Jonah in a whale's belly and Joshua making the sun to stand still. It seems a pity that those who wrote the scriptures should, after recording this little incident in the life of Jesus,

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have forgotten the catalogue of signs and wonders alleged to have been given to that generation.

If the signs that are recorded in the Bible, such as the various miracles, the transfiguration, the resurrection, the rending of the veil of the temple, the dead coming to life, the ascension, are true, obviously Jesus was wrong when he said no sign should be given to that generation. The redactors, as usual, have been very negligent.

In any case, that figure who sighed and said wearily no sign should be given to that generation was egregiously human.

"And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven" (Luke xii, 10).

This is a hard saying, but it clearly puts the Holy Ghost and Jesus on different levels if Jesus is to be identified with the "Son of Man."

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii, 32).

But God the Father and God the Son are co-equal together. Such as the Father is, such is the Son. God knows. The Son is God. Therefore the Son knows.

Jesus had been saying, according to Mark, some most astonishing things. He had said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"; and then followed the verse we have quoted. What does it mean? We could understand the passing away of the earth, but why should heaven pass away? Is that true?

In the 24th and 25th verses of the same chapter it says: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,

“And the stars of the heaven shall fall.....”

The idea that the stars were above the earth and might presumably *fall* was quite common in the days of the early Christians; but a God would not have expressed himself like that.

In Mark x, 4, Jesus is made to say, “But to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give.” That could not apply to God. “Such as the Father is such is the Son.” All three gods were co-equal. Jesus spoke as an exalted man, not as a god.

And how do those who press the view of Christ's divinity explain that remark to the Canaanite woman: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”?

If Jesus had been a god he could not have said that. To begin with, he would not have used the word “sent.” If he were a god, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, there could be no question of anybody “sending” him. But the idea that he was only to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel is fatally contrary to the doctrine of the Christian Churches. They tell us Jesus came to save sinners regardless of race or colour. But he said, No, he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And when he sent out his disciples he said: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles.....” Obviously Jesus did not think he had come to save the world. He was eminently a Jew.

The generations that followed Jesus hammered out their creed, as we have seen, during centuries of meditation, cogitation, argument, and persecution. As a last word they used the rack and the stake. And the extraordinary thing is, if anybody had said that the Christian religion was for Jews only in the days of the Inquisition, he would have been put to death for denying the authority of the Church.

A strange idea comes to us: suppose Jesus had



come to life again in the days of Torquemada, would he have been burnt at the stake, the great figure at an *auto da fé*?

But probably the most human of all the reported sayings of Jesus is that which he is said to have uttered on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

From a god that expression is meaningless and frankly impossible. A god who is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father could not cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If Jesus were god, he was as much god when he was on the cross as on the lake of Galilee or in the tomb. If he had come to earth to let all people know that from henceforth they need not be damned, then on the cross he might have said something familiar to the other gods or something touching to men. But as he was a man, who had had visions of men living better lives, of a world from which had fled the shadows of cant and hypocrisy and falsehood and all evil speaking and evil doing; of a world made new by love and sympathy; and had also trodden his path, now in the ecstasy of great expectation, now a prey to dark despair, so that he "sighed" or "wept," then, at the last, when he saw his end was sure, and men stood cold as spears, and the hills seemed indifferent and the sky unresponsive, and he felt that those things had not been accomplished which he had hoped for, the heart of the great pitier burst into that heart-strung, human note: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

There is no note of the God there. We are suspicious of those words. No man in the moment of agony "quotes." Those words are from the twenty-second psalm, and might well be put into the mouth of Christ by a sentimentalist, by the writer who was *not* an artist. Original, they ring true; quoted, they

are false. But we take the words as the Bible gives them to us, and say they are not those of a god.

Common sense, applied to the study of the documents that are given for our edification, will refuse to admit that the case for Christ's divinity has been made out. The evidence that Jesus was a man is clear from the Gospels, and should hit the meanest as well as the ripest intelligence. The difficulty is with believers ; reason is no guide to them.

Some Christians in their zeal hold the idea that Jesus might be adjudged a god from his teaching. They have the notion that there has been nothing to equal it in moral worth since the world began. As evidence of Christ's divinity they instance it. That a man speaks wisely is no evidence of divinity.

Jesus taught and said nothing that could fairly be called original. The one thing we should hope to get from his teaching would be a clear statement of what human beings ought to believe. On the assumption that Jesus was a god, who had come to earth at this particular moment in the world's history to give people tidings of great joy, we grope and grope for those tidings.

They were simplicity itself, according to the Christian. Because Adam sinned all men die. Jesus is God. He has come to earth to die instead of men ; and men can escape eternal damnation by believing it.

Why did not Jesus say that? How is it we never got from him so simple a statement as that?

He began by preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. But that was not new. He borrowed that idea from John the Baptist. Then we get a record of wonderful events, of parables, of small sermons, incidents in a short life. Even the men who were with him as his immediate followers could not understand him at times. When a god speaks

he wants to be heard ; if he wishes to be heard he wishes to be understood.

On one occasion Jesus point blank refused to tell even the Chief Priests and Scribes (who, according to the Bible, were carrying on the worship that had been designed in all its most elaborate ritual and embroidery by God himself) by what authority he spoke and acted as he did.

Was it not a good opportunity to impress these religious leaders, who were engaged in keeping unspotted from the world the religion they had received from the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Samaritans, the Moabites, the Persians, the Egyptians, and other nations? A word to these people at that time might have had a far-reaching effect ; it might have made the Jews, who now cover the earth in the varied ghettos, Christians.

Jesus merely said : "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

That is the answer of a man. It is the answer of the man who is not regarded with favour by the Chief Priests and Scribes. The Chief Priests and Scribes seem to have gone about like primed and lusty hecklers. Certainly they never got the better of Jesus till the end ; but one must remember that they thought (and Christians agree) they had received their religion direct from Jehovah, and Jesus treated them with an opprobrium that suggests priests are not necessarily immune from criticism.

We have said that Jesus preached nothing original. The Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount are the two principal teachings of Jesus. It will be remembered that Christ's disciples asked him to teach them a prayer, which suggests that up to this point he had not got them into habits of praying. If God is just, prayer is futile, and wise men know it.

Reverent men, men who are religious and believe

the things they were taught in their childhood, pray because they have been told that prayer is, if not necessary to salvation, at least helpful and advantageous. Most of the prayers one reads are requests by man to God. They have a moral tone as a rule ; but in times of drought men pray for rain, in sickness they pray for health, in danger they pray for succour, and in war they pray to have their enemies smitten hip and thigh.

The Jews prayed. John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. And Jesus gave his disciples a prayer—so we are told ; but there is not an original line in it. If some one had wished to invent a prayer and put it into the mouth of Jesus, he could have found these phrases in Jewish use in the old scriptures or the Talmud or the customary Jewish prayer.

“Our Father which art in heaven, be gracious to us. O Lord our God, hallowed be Thy name, and let the remembrance of Thee be glorified in heaven above and upon earth here below. Let Thy Kingdom reign over us now and for ever. The holy men of old said, Remit and forgive unto all men whatsoever they have done against me. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil thing. For Thine is the Kingdom, and thou shalt reign in glory for ever and ever more.”

The Jews had a prayer called the *Kadesh*, which was borrowed very probably from the Babylonians, from whom the Jews took so much of their religion ; and any scribe wishing to concoct a prayer would have had no more difficulty than a modern local preacher. If Jesus really gave what is known as the “Lord’s Prayer” to his disciples, he was no more original than a man would be to-day who said as grace before meat, “For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.”

The *Encyclopædia Biblica* says ; “The truth is that

we may say of the Lord's Prayer—applying what Theodore Zahn lately wrote of the teaching of Jesus as a whole—that *Jesus uttered things which were said almost literally by Jewish teachers before and after him.*" From Christian scholars this is frank.

The Sermon on the Mount, which has inspired pictures and discourses innumerable, did not find a happy inspiration in its retailers or redactors. Mark, the oldest of the synoptic writers, does not mention it. That is surely a remarkable omission. Did Mark think it of no value? Or was it that a "sermon" was not deemed worthy of concoction in the days when Mark wrote his Gospel? We must apply our common sense to this matter as to others. It does not follow that Jesus delivered a sermon from a mountain because Matthew says so.

The writer of Matthew's Gospel most probably never heard the "Sermon." It may be hearsay. It may be an agreeable compilation. And he who wrote the gospel "according to John" never heard of it, or did not think it worth a record!

To hear the priest in the pulpit expatiating on this sermon is to feel that its delivery must have been one of the most noteworthy events in the life of Jesus. The echoes of it ring in tin chapel and in Gothic aisles to this day. And Mark and John did not deem it worth a line! Reading their inspired Gospels, you must come to the conclusion either that there was no sermon on a mount or that it was of no importance.

These old writers had their idiosyncrasies. They worked on somebody else's copy according to their own plan. John's omission to mention it is interesting, for his Gospel was not written till a hundred years and more had passed after Christ's death; and a great many sayings and a great many doings had been thought of during that period, and the redactors had

had time to consider whether a sermon on a mount or in a plain was worthy of compilation.

Let us see what authoritative Christians say about it :—

“ It is a composition *rather than an actual address*. That it was carried in some retentive memory as it now stands is a perfectly unmanageable hypothesis. The well-known habit of compiling material which stamps Matthew’s Gospel is legible all through the *oratio montana* ; earlier and later logia are massed together, and even their dexterous union cannot obliterate their heterogeneous nature and foreign sites.”

“ Whatever be Luke’s method elsewhere in dealing with his sources, the Sermon exhibits *traces of considerable freedom on the part of the editor*.....His sources vibrate with feelings similar in many parts to that felt in the Epistle of James, Hermes, etc.....The inference is that Luke has either translated from Q with a freedom which makes his rendering something of a paraphrase, or (as is more probable) that, like Matthew, he has edited and in part re-written a Greek recension of Q ” (*Encyclopædia Biblica*).

From which we gather that, when Christian critics say that, nobody can say anything authoritative about this sermon. Mark and John behave as if there never was a “ Sermon on the Mount.” Matthew and Luke give accounts that nobody—with scholarship, that is—will admit more than that they copied from a copy and followed their literary and doctrinal inclinations rather than the copy when they wished. And if you are anxious to know where it was delivered, you have great difficulty in coming to a decision ; for while Matthew says “ he went up into a mountain,” Luke says he “ stood in the plain.”

One Gospel says it was delivered on a mountain. One says it was delivered on a plain. And two practically imply it was not delivered at all !

And when Christian critics suggest that the two who give us the sermon have used "considerable freedom" in copying or propagating this sermon, we feel that nobody could say from this particular story that the Bible was inspired by an Almighty God. That no such sermon was delivered is now generally agreed. Luke and Matthew gathered sayings, and one put them into Jesus's mouth in the plain and the other on the mountain.

That, however, is not quite the issue at the moment. We wished to show that this famous Sermon on the Mount—or the plain, according to whether you disbelieve Luke or Matthew—was not in its essence original. Practically all the sayings in this sermon are to be found in the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Apocrypha, or the "Teachings of the Twelve Apostles"!

Let us put it this way: Matthew and Luke may have wished to write down a sermon, very much as people in English and Welsh villages do to-day. As of old fervent writers began with "Once upon a time," or "Thus saith the Lord," or "In those days," so in the early days of Christianity men attributed sayings and deeds to Jesus that he did not say or do. He may have quoted many apt remarks from the existing writings; but there is really no original idea in the Sermon on the Mount, any more than there is in the Lord's Prayer. It was as easy to compile a sermon as a prayer.

Here are a few quotations taken from *Christianity and Mythology*, by J. M. Robertson (pp. 404-7):—

"The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low and he saved me. Ps. cxvi, 6.

"Mysteries are revealed unto the meek.....The Lord .....is honoured of the lowly. Ecclesiasticus iii, 19-20.

"He that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour. Prov. xxix, 23. Cp. Prov. xv, 32; xvi, 19.

"Wherever there is any question in the Bible of the greatness of God, his love for the humble is spoken of. Talmud, *Megilla*, p. 31, recto.

"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Isa. lvii, 15.

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. Ps. cxlvii, 3.

"The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Ps. xxxvii, 11.

"Whosoever hath mercy on men, on him also God hath mercy. Talmud, *Schabboth*, fol. 151, 2.

"Seek peace and pursue it. Ps. xxxiv, 14.

"He who causes his brother publicly to blush shall have no part in the future life. Talmud, *Aboth* iii, 13.

"Be slow to embroil thyself, and be easy to be reconciled. Talmud, *Pirké-Aboth* ii, 10.

"He who regards a woman with an impure intention has already as it were committed adultery. Talmud, *Kallah*, beginning.

"In every act it is above all the thought, the intention, which God inquires into, and which he will judge. Talmud, *Yoma*, fol. 29, a.

"Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him. Lam. iii, 30.

"It is not the wicked we should hate, but wickedness. Talmud, *Berachoth*, p. 10, recto."

In "The Book of the Secrets of Enoch," which was based on pre-Christian material, there are nine beatitudes—an inspiration to one who might wish to compile a sermon on a mount or in a plain.

So that from Christ's teaching we get no note to lead us to say this is so different from the work of man that it cannot be by a man. It is all so very human.

How did this idea of Jesus being a god come? Did



it shoot up in the night like Jonah's gourd? Or did it grow?

It grew.

It is very evident that Jesus was not mistaken for a god in his life. He was known as a member of a large family, the head of which was Joseph, a carpenter. He was actually scoffed at in the place where he was best known. The account in Mark does not proceed lucidly. What we can gather is that Jesus went into the synagogue and did what all Jews instructed in the scriptures were entitled to do—explained what he read. Mark says: "And many were astonished..... Is not this the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and Judas and Simon?"

That Jesus imagined at last he was the Messiah is possible. But the idea of the Messiah among the Jews was that of a deliverer from the yoke of the oppressor, one who would make Judah the greatest of nations. Jesus may personally have construed this in a moral sense; he saw further into the heart of man and cared less for trappings. But his apostles were not on his level. They were Jews eager to know who would sit on his right hand and on his left.

And after Christ's death the Christians waited for him to come again in great glory as the conquering Messiah. This did not materialize either, though the hope still discovers a resting-place in the bosoms of those whose intellectual feet seem to find no sure footing.

It was when the Christians waited for this second coming, as they talked and wrote about Jesus, that they thought of many things he had probably never done and many sayings he had never uttered.

No creed can retain its early simplicity. The priest must invent as the bird must fly. There had to be tales and rituals, and so tales grew and rituals were elaborated. It is the way of all religions.

Christianity grew up surrounded by other creeds, which Christians politely term "heathen" or "pagan." The Jews still worshipped Jehovah. Buddhism had travelled to Persia, and its myths and mysteries were known in Egypt and Greece. Mithraism had come to Rome, and was as flourishing as Carthage had once been. The Egyptians had a store-house of religion, from which the most unbending as well as the least enterprising could not fail to gain some interest. Greece offered a multitude of gods and an abundance of philosophy. The atmosphere of the world was laden with godish ideas. They were as many as the harbours of the seas. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, water, trees, man himself, had excited wonder and provoked tongues. The tales that had been invented of a god, born of a virgin, being persecuted, but issuing from the struggle triumphantly and giving his followers peace, were as familiar as the waters round the coasts.

This is the catalogue of the thrashing out of the idea that Jesus was a god.

When Jesus was alive he was considered as a man. He was regarded as the Messiah by the early Christians.

Mosheim says : " Jesus himself established but two rites which it is not lawful either to change or to abrogate—viz., *baptism* and the *Lord's supper*..... That he chose to establish no more rites ought to convince us that ceremonies are not essential to the religion of *Christ*."

Accepting the statement that Jesus was baptised by John, and that before he died he asked his followers to remember him when they broke bread and drank wine, one sees what kind of a rite the priest can develop. But to-day's rites and ceremonies are beyond counting. The average Christian neither understands nor could repeat half of them. Creeds

and articles and observances and all the paraphernalia of worship have grown from this small grain of Christian mustard seed planted nearly two thousand years ago.

The Gnostics believed that Jesus had been sent by God, but that he had not a real human body. This was not a fleeting idea held by, say, Simon Magus and a few of his followers ; it persisted for centuries after Christ's death. How was it these sincere people came to hold such a belief ? Obviously by thinking it as others got their beliefs.

The Gnostics said Jesus, till his baptism, was a man. They heard of the story of the descent of the Holy Ghost, and so with theological inevitability came to the conclusion that Jesus then became god and ceased to be man, holding with rational inevitability that for a person to be man *and* god was impossible. On the cross Christ left the body, and it was Jesus who died. It had the priestly fascination of subtlety, and could be argued, as it was, for hundreds of years.

The Ebionites, who had probably known Jesus in the flesh and all the members of the family, held Gnostic views. They scoffed at the notion of the "virgin birth"; they lived severe, moral lives, and they called themselves fervent Christians. They declared they had received this teaching—or revelation, as all zealous religionists call it—from heaven or from Matthias, who was one of Christ's apostles, and, therefore, quite as sound an authority on the matter as Paul, who never met Jesus. And these Gnostics were accounted Christians, as Justin Martyr testified.

Gnosticism put up a great fight, but, being defeated, its literature was treated as the defeated have generally been defeated in Hebrew chronicles—it was hewn in pieces.

Polycarp said : "He is at once flesh and spirit, begotten and unbegotten, God come in the flesh, the

real life, both from Mary and from God, at first passible and then impassible."

What does it mean? How is Jesus "begotten and unbegotten"? Surely he was one or the other. And what is "*real*" life? Is it any different from the life ordinary mortals know? One sees them floundering in the ocean of cloudy speculation.

The holy fathers took what was good in other religions with the ease and righteous bearing of conquerors. They heard of the "*logos*." The *logos* merely meant that when God spoke what he said was really part of himself; it was divine wisdom, because what God said was wisdom. Jesus was God's mouth-piece, his revealer, his *word*. The Gospels that were written by "Matthew," "Mark," and "Luke" contain no theories of a *logos*; but the Gospel "according to John" starts off with: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

This was an idea that had never occurred to Jesus. He never talked of God being a "Word." Greek philosophy had forged this idea, which had been absorbed by the Christian fathers. They found it quite a fascinating idea, and, of course, as it is in the Bible, which is inspired, it carries weight. But it came from Greeks who knew nothing whatever about Jesus.

If Jesus was the *logos*, he was a god. And if Jesus was a god, then there were obviously two gods. And if the Holy Ghost was a god, there were three gods. This was quickly seen, so the Christians had to meet the charge that they were polytheists.

A school of thought struggled with the idea, and finally came to this doctrine: God is inscrutable, unknowable. But he assumes different forms when he has to deal with the world, and these forms are known as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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That was the doctrine known as Monarchianism. One is inclined to ask how these Monarchians got their knowledge of a God who was "inscrutable" and "unknowable." But it shows the hard thinking and the bold speculating of the time.

Of course, the doctrine could not rest there. Few doctrines in any religion have had peace when reason got a foot. Other holy fathers said that Jesus did not always exist because we know when he was born, therefore there was a time when he was not, and therefore he could not be the equal of God, and was probably not a god. This was the doctrine of the Arians.

The Arians came to that conclusion by a logical process. But logic has never been a strong point with theologians, because their hypotheses have been based on unreason. It was far more important to say things that squared with the dogma than to employ reason on it. Those who opposed the Arians had not to show that Arian reasoning was unsound; all that was necessary was to declare that those who said Jesus was not a god were heretics. That was easy, priestly, and final.

A meeting was held at Nicæa, which we have already dealt with. The unbaptised Constantine presided. Athanasius thundered. Those who were in favour of Athanasius said "Aye"; the Arians said "No." Noses were counted, and the "ayes" had it. So was solved the doctrine of the divinity of Christ.

If regrets were any use—which they are not—the civilized world ought to sit in sackcloth and ashes when it thinks of what man has made of the figure and teaching of Jesus.

Only now and again in the world's history has a man seen the way, the truth, and the light, and declared it in such wise that he has arrested the

flood of human passions and prejudices, and turned humanity on to the fine, clear road. Such men were Lao-Tsze, Confucius, Buddha, Asoka, Akhnaten, Jesus.

These men had grasped the essentials; but they were all born out of due season. Facts cannot live in a sea of fiction. The fanciful ideas of common men have swallowed up the truths the great have preached, so that mankind has always been turned from the pure and the truthful to what was involved, muddled, degrading. In dealing with the long past one feels more historical than reproachful. But what a pity that some teacher of plain, sound truth was not allowed his chance! He had his little hour; there was hope for the world. But the priests were there. They were the leaders of the tribe or the race. Ideas had to fit in with their preconceived notions, or the new ideas and their idealist perished like the lamb at the slaughter. They represented their time. In the development of mind they were no more than the hairy arboreal lemur or the cave-dwelling Neanderthal in the history of the race. Ideas have developed like bodies. Wisdom has been gained after long travail. Religions have grown like all things human.

If men had accepted and followed the teaching of Jesus, and had not felt obliged to make him a god, to give him a virgin mother, to attach to him a string of pseudo miracles, to cut each other's throats about insignificant tassels on their sham embroidery of him, what a different world we might have had! His teaching in respect of behaviour was the essential, and the priests thought it was, above all things, necessary to have a creed.

It did not matter that Jesus was not actually original in his speech; he was original in his personality. He crystallized the truth and beauty of his age into

conduct and the way to live. This poor carpenter of Nazareth saw more clearly the value of love and sympathy, of peace and goodwill, than all the princes and rulers, popes and cardinals, politicians and generals, who have cursed the world with their evil speaking, lying, and slandering, their envy, hatred, and malice, their wars and rumours of wars.

"Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled."

"Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

Jesus would never have shouldered arms to fight his brother man. All the casuistry in all the chancelleries would never have moved him. How can one harmonize peace and forgiveness, love and mercy, with a bloody war?

Yet all the priests of all the creeds in the combatant countries stood out in the last war screeching to heaven for the blood of their enemies. Those in the neutral countries behaved as they did in Rome—watched it with the unbiased eyes of vultures.

This is what priestliness has made of Jesus.

What a mockery of his teaching! What a pity for mankind!

Yet, as we have said, we understand the inevitability of it all. Men were not fit for Christianity; they had to make it a thaumaturgic religion of mysteries, ceremonies, and creeds. They could not be satisfied with conduct without claptrap. The myths and

notions of the time were too much for the holy fathers.

What a pity !

"Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom."

That was Christ's prophecy. Two thousand years have passed away, and not only has the generation that Christ addressed passed away, but how many others !

We would like to add a quotation from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. It is from the article on the "Gospels," and occurs in col. 1,881. The writer has cited those sayings of Jesus which were essentially human, and he says they are the "foundation pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus." He admits they endorse the humanity of Jesus, and says : "In reality, however, they prove.....that in the person of Jesus we have to do *with a completely human being, and that the divine is to be sought in him only in the form in which it is capable of being found in a man.*"

The italics are ours. Such a quotation needs no comment.



## CHAPTER XVI

### MYTHS—BUDDHA—KRISHNA—WHAT CHRISTIANS COULD AND DID BORROW FROM MYTHS

WE have already said that myths were “in the air” at the time Christianity was launched ; so it is plain how easy it was for Christians to build their temples with stones and ornaments taken from other religions. That they did absorb doctrines and ceremonies from pagan religions is undeniable. Christian scholars admit it freely.

Sun- and vegetation-myths were common. That the sun went through a threatening time at his birth—December 25—and “passed over” the equinox into full glory, lends itself to stories of Mithras, of Osiris, of Adonis—of legion. The ceremonies that celebrated these events were practised before Jesus was born.

Mr. J. M. Robertson contends that Jesus was as mythical as Mithras, and that the Christians merely made him the central figure of an old myth in a new setting. The reader who is not well acquainted with the subject of myths may find interest and yeast for thought in the following details that attach to the life of Buddha :—

Buddha, who lived over five hundred years before Jesus, was born of the Virgin Maya (which is the same as Mary).

Maya conceived by the Holy Ghost.

The birth of Buddha was announced in the heavens by a star.

Buddha was born on December 25.

Angels sang in heaven : “To-day Bodhisatwa is

born on earth, to give joy and peace to men and Devas, to shed light in the dark places, to give sight to the blind."

The infant Buddha was visited by wise men, who recognized his divinity. "Costly jewels and precious substances" were presented to him.

Buddha's life was threatened by King Bimbisara, who was advised to destroy the child, as he was liable to overthrow him.

When twelve years old Buddha was presented in the temple, where he asked and answered deep questions.

The ancestry of Buddha was traced through his father Sudhodana, through various individuals and races, all of royal dignity, to *Maha Sammata*, the first monarch of the world.

When Buddha was about to go forth "to adopt a religious life," Mara (the equivalent of Satan) appeared before him to tempt him.

Buddha fasted for a long period.

Buddha, the Saviour, was baptised, and at this baptism the Spirit of God was present—that is, not only the highest God, but also the "Holy Ghost."

Buddha was transfigured.

Buddha performed miracles.

Buddha rose from the dead.

Buddha is expected to come back to earth to bring happiness.

There are many other parallels between Jesus and Buddha. Buddha only offered himself as a teacher, but when he was dead his followers made him a god. (For fuller details see *Bible Myths*, by T. W. Doane.)

This is a strange coincidence, and worthy the inquiry of all men. Buddha lived before Christ, and the same doctrines are common to both.

Professor Max Müller, commenting on these likenesses, said; "Between the language of Buddha and

his disciples, and the language of Christ and his apostles, there are strange coincidences. Even some of the Buddhist legends and parables sound as if taken from the New Testament, though we know that many of them existed before the beginning of the Christian era " (*Science and Religion*, p. 243).

The following incidents are recorded in the life of the Hindoo Saviour, Krishna :—

He was born of a chaste virgin.

A star shone at his birth.

The heavens declared the wonderful event.

Krishna was born in a cave.

When he was born, the cave was lit up and " the countenances of his father and mother emitted rays of glory."

Krishna was adored by cowherds, who recognized his greatness.

Krishna was presented with gifts of sandalwood and perfumes.

Krishna's father fled with him for safety because the king sought his life.

There was a massacre of the innocents.

Krishna did things as a boy similar to those recorded of Jesus in the Apocryphal Gospels.

Krishna worked miracles.

Krishna was crucified, and wonderful signs were observed at the time, very similar to those observed by the writers of the Gospels.

Krishna was pierced by an arrow.

Krishna descended into hell.

Krishna is to come again to judge the earth.

Krishna was transfigured.

Krishna is the second person in the Hindoo Trinity.

It is difficult to say exactly what one religion has borrowed from another, especially if there has been much oral tradition. That the Christians borrowed regardlessly and amply we know.

It is plain that these old religions are based on the ritual of sun-worship. The festivals are fixed at astronomical times, either at the equinoxes or solstices. Figures are constantly recurring which suggest divisions of astronomical time. The details vary, but in the main the stories run on similar lines.

The fact is, the Christians were able to draw on mythology and paganism and the floating philosophies of the time sufficient to build round the figure of Jesus a religion that was as attractive as Mithraism. Christianity cannot claim originality for the idea of—

The Saviour,  
The God-man,  
The Virgin Birth,  
The Massacre of the Innocents,  
Stars as signs,  
Voices from heaven,  
Baptism,  
Miracles,  
The Eucharist,  
The Crucifixion,  
The Resurrection,  
The Trinity,

December 25 as the birthday of a god,  
The equinoxes or solstices as special seasons,  
Sun-day as *the* day—that is, the first day of the week being the “Sabbath,” and not the *seventh* day, as Christians tell us their God commanded.

And many other details in the Gospel narratives.

“Deep researches would show that nearly everything in Christianity that does not depend on the Gospel is mere baggage brought from the Pagan mysteries into the hostile camp. The primitive Christian worship was nothing but a mystery. The whole interior police of the Church, the degrees of initiation, the command of silence, and the crowd of phrases in the ecclesiastical language have no other

origin. The revolution which overthrew Paganism seems, at first glance, a sharp, trenchant, and absolute rupture with the past ; and such, in fact, it was if we consider only the dogmatic rigidity and the austere moral tone which characterized the new religion. But in respect of worship and outward observances the change was effected by an insensible transition, and the popular faith saved its most familiar symbols from shipwreck. Christianity introduced, at first, so little change into the habits of private and social life that with great numbers in the fourth and fifth centuries it remains uncertain whether they were Pagans or Christians ; many seem even to have pursued an irresolute course between the two worships" (Renan, *Religions of Antiquity*).

Note the time. In the *fourth and fifth centuries*—even after all that time after Christ you could scarcely tell from his worship whether a man were Pagan or Christian !

Ernest de Bunsen says : " With the remarkable exception of the death of Jesus on the cross, and of the doctrine of atonement by vicarious suffering, which is absolutely excluded by Buddhism, the most ancient of the Buddhistic records known to us contain statements about the life and the doctrines of Gautama Buddha which correspond in a remarkable manner, and impossibly by mere chance, with the traditions recorded in the Gospels about the life and doctrines of Jesus Christ. It is still more strange that these Buddhistic legends about Gautama as the Angel Messiah refer to a doctrine which we find only in the Epistles of Paul and in the fourth Gospel. This can be explained by the assumption of a common source of information ; but then the serious question must be considered why the doctrine of the Angel Messiah, supposing it to have been revealed, and which we find in the East and in the West, is not contained in

any of the Scriptures of the Old Testament which can possibly have been written before the Babylonian Captivity, nor in the first three Gospels. Can the systematic keeping-back of essential truth be attributed to God or to man?" (*Angel Messiah*, p. 50).

We suggest there was no "keeping-back of essential truth." The reason why doctrines got into the Bible was because the priests thought them advantageous or part of the paraphernalia of religion. A "redactor" reading over an old gospel would be shocked if he saw that some new ceremony or observance or doctrine were not mentioned, and would dexterously insert a passage to justify it. In that way religion grew authoritatively, and was able to claim divine revelation or inspiration.

Mosheim says candidly but rather naïvely: "If it were known what opinions were advanced and maintained by the men of most intelligence among the Oriental nations at the time when the Christian religion began to enlighten mankind, many things in the early history of the Church might be more fully and more accurately explained."

We are accumulating knowledge concerning these matters, and consequently finding it easier to explain the early history of the Church.

This is from Mosheim: "The Platonists and Pythagoreans deemed it not only lawful but commendable to deceive and to lie for the sake of truth and piety. The Jews living in Egypt learned from them this sentiment before the Christian era, as appears from many proofs. *And from both this vice early spread among the Christians.* Of this no one will doubt who calls to mind the numerous forgeries of books under the names of eminent men.....The Christians were pronounced Atheists because they were destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests.....To silence this accusation the Christian doctors thought they must

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introduce some external rites which would strike the senses of people.....Hence the origin of first fruits, and next of tithes ; hence the splendid garments and other things. In like manner, the comparison of the Christian *oblations* with the Jewish victims and sacrifices produced many unnecessary rites ; and in time corrupted essentially the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, which, ere they were aware of it, was converted into a *sacrifice*.....A large part, therefore, of the Christian observances and institutions even in this century had the aspect of the Pagan mysteries."

You can almost see the Christian religion being built up line by line.

But where do we see the light from heaven ? Where do we hear the voice of God ? Where do we discern one breath of inspiration ? It is surely man inventing, copying, altering, forging, lying, fulminating, deluding. It is man first and last.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE RESURRECTION—THE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE  
GOSPEL NARRATIVES — THE MYTHICAL SOURCE —  
LOISY—MATTHEW ARNOLD—BAUR—*ENCYCLOPÆDIA*  
*BIBLICA*

THE resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the keystone of the Christian religion. There appear to be many keystones, but "if Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain."

The reader knows that gods or man-gods have been sacrificed from time immemorial. The idea that the god or god-man died is the elaboration of that simple offering to the sun in the days of fertility worship when fruit and vegetables, as well as the beasts of the field, were offered as sacrifices to the gods that gave them. Buddha died for mankind. Osiris, Horus, Tammuz, and Adonis, all virgin born gods, were saviours, and suffered death.

We will now follow the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as it is reported in the Bible, bearing in mind that, while the Christians deny the truth of all the other stories, they say theirs was written at the inspiration of God, and not only can, but must, be accepted as true.

Jesus had been preaching about a year, though John, in the exuberance of his desire to send Jesus oftener to Jerusalem, makes it about three years. Signs in plenty had been given to that generation, even though Jesus said none should be given them; but somehow the Jews refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and the Chief Priests and Scribes, wishing



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to arrest him, did not dare to do it on a feast-day because they feared the people.

If that were so, one might conclude that Jesus was well known. He ought to have been well known, because he had had more than one argument with these people, and he had even gone so far as to whip the money-changers and those that sold doves out of the temple. A well-known and easily recognized figure, we should have said.

And this view seems to be borne out by the remark of Jesus himself, who said: "I was daily with you in the temple, and ye took me not." Yet we are told the Chief Priests and Scribes went to Judas to ask him to point out Jesus.

In another Gospel we are told Judas went to the priests, and not the priests to Judas. Luke says Satan entered into Judas, and John knows nothing about any agreement between Judas and the priests; he introduces that beautiful touch of the ready writer, "And it was night." The Gospels, as one sees, have many differences. We are told by Matthew that Judas took the money back to the priests, threw it on the ground, and went away and hanged himself. Mark never heard a word of this. Nor did Luke. Nor John. The writer of the "Acts" says Judas bought a field and met with a horrible end there—his bowels gushed out. So three of the Gospel writers never heard of the end of Judas; one says he hanged himself, and another writer says "his bowels gushed out." And Papias, an early Father, says Judas lived and grew fat, and was crushed against a wall. Each Gospel has its own details. It is curious in that it gives us a mentality of the disciples which is contemptible, or it suggests pure fiction. We may conclude that these followers of Jesus were not filled with a courageous spirit, though we are subsequently told that one of them carried a sword and used it, and

then was such a coward that he lied brazenly about his master—an incident that has the ring of the false coin. But note what happened at the Last Supper. Jesus said :

“ Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

“ And then they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? .....

“ Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.”

And then they all continued to behave as if there was no traitor in the midst of them ! It is a preposterous situation. If this had happened, one of the disciples must surely have had enough decency to protest against the continued presence of the traitor. The situation as it stands recorded is inexplicable. Except on the ground, of course, that it did not happen. John clearly says Jesus gave himself up, and the *Encyclopædia Biblica* finds the story too difficult for mastication. It suggests that the presence of a traitor among the disciples is a reflection on Jesus. He chose the disciples. Was he so human, so poorly human, that he chose a man to be one of his daily attendants—the man, too, who carried the purse, who was going to betray him? And the writer of the article adds : “ The probability is that no one knew how the emissaries of the Pharisees found Jesus so easily, and that the story of Judas’s treason *was a very early attempt to imagine an explanation.*”

We are inclined to agree with this suggestion which comes from so eminent a Christian source.

The writers of the Gospels have a confused notion, too, of Jesus’s eating of the Passover. We shall see they are confused at every foot of the way. Matthew, Mark, and Luke make the Crucifixion take place on

the day of the Passover. John, however, makes it the day before. They cannot even agree as to the day Jesus was crucified !

That Jesus is betrayed is the story as told by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They say Judas kissed Jesus. John does not agree. He says that, when Jesus saw a band of men and officers, he went to them, asked them what they wanted, and when they said, "Jesus of Nazareth," he replied, "I am he." That precludes all suggestion of a betrayal.

Simon Peter was so hot in his master's defence that he cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest, with a sword that, as a follower of the Prince of Peace, he had provided himself with. When somebody, however, accused him of being a follower of Jesus, almost immediately after he had been so brave, the great apostle denied his master. Three times Peter denied he was a follower of Jesus, and then a cock crew.

The crowing of this cock is one of the remarkable of the apparently insignificant details in the Bible, because it happened that cocks did not crow in Jerusalem—they were not allowed there. It is interesting to speculate why the cock is introduced. It may have been to please the sun-worshippers ; for the cock was one of the symbols of the sun. It is most likely that many of these apparently insignificant details are traceable to the vestiges of old usage, religious freemasonry, either among the Christians or the followers of other religions. Some of them seem to spring up without motive.

Another explanation might be that Jesus, knowing Peter, suggested that impetuous man was likely to fail him in the hour of need, and said he would betray him before the cock crew. Years after, those who wrote these Gospels heard of Christ's remark, and so made a cock crew.

It is worth while noticing how the inspired writers

treated this incident. Matthew does not know who cut off the ear from the high priest's servant. Neither does Mark, who was supposed to be the Boswell to Peter. Luke does not know who did it; but when he wrote the account he added that Jesus healed the man's ear, though none of the others heard of *that*. John, an appreciator of the dazzle of miracles, had not even heard of it; but he tells us clearly that Simon Peter used the sword, and that the name of the high priest's servant was Malchus. John had a gift for names.

John apparently heard of a remarkable incident which happened when Jesus was about to be arrested.

"As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, *and fell to the ground.*"

Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke heard a whisper of that extraordinary event.

According to John, Jesus was led straight away by the soldiers to Annas. But according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, nothing of that kind happened.

If the reader is troubled by the idea that these writings were "inspired," he will be very troubled; but if he will consider that Mark's Gospel appeared first, that Matthew copied from him, that Luke was a later copier, and John was by far the most original writer of them all, he will see things quite clearly and will not be troubled at all.

When Jesus was taken before the high priest, he was asked, according to Matthew: "Tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God.

"Jesus saith unto him: Thou hast said."

Mark's version is: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

"And Jesus said: I am."

Luke has more, but he comes to this: "Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them: Ye say that I am."

John says : "The High Priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and his doctrine," and says nothing of the question, "Art thou the Christ?" or "the Son of God?" or "the Son of the Blessed?"

Mark, Matthew, and Luke practically agree on Christ's reply to Pilate; but John inserts a curious dialogue: "Jesus answered him: Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"

"Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?....." And John introduced the "My Kingdom is not of this world," et cetera. Pilate answers philosophically, "What is truth?"

None of this is in the other Gospels. But it ought to be if the dialogue occurred.

Luke introduces an incident that ought surely not to have been overlooked by the others. He says that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, and adds that Herod was in Jerusalem at that time, which shows of what small account was Herod, the King, for Annas and Caia-phas and the high priests had practically decided on the death of Jesus, and Pilate merely gave it sanction. But if we trust to the accounts in Mark, Matthew, and John, Jesus did not go before Herod, for the narrative in each of those three Gospels is carried on continuously.

Luke also makes Pilate say, "I find no fault in this man," and he adds that Herod also found no fault in him! Neither Mark, Matthew, nor John heard a word of this.

Matthew introduced the hand-washing incident. He may have wished to please the Romans, or particularly to displease the Jews. But neither Mark, Luke, nor John knew anything of Pilate's dramatic washing of his hands.

Mark says they clothed Jesus with purple.

Matthew says scarlet; but neither Luke nor John mentions this.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke say Simon of Cyrene carried the cross. John says Jesus carried his own cross !

Luke makes Jesus turn and address the women who followed him : " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves." The others did not hear a word.

Mark says Jesus was crucified at the " third hour." John says it was the *sixth* hour !

One would think that the superscription on the cross would live imperishably in the memory. This is how it is recorded in the books which Christians claim were inspired by God :—

" The King of the Jews " (Mark).

" This is Jesus the King of the Jews " (Matthew).

" This is the King of the Jews " (Luke).

" Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews " (John).

Mark says : " They parted his garments, casting lots upon them."

Matthew repeats that.

Luke gets a little muddled with the phrase, and writes : " And they parted his raiment *and* cast lots."

John elaborates that, making two actions of it, and dragging in a prophecy. He says they divided his garments into four parts, *and cast lots for his coat !*

John makes Jesus address his mother from the cross. There is not a hint of this from Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

Mark says thieves were crucified with him. John merely says two " others." Matthew adds that the thieves mocked him. Luke makes one of the thieves rebuke the other, thus introducing the reply : " To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Luke bears the palm for the introduction of little dramatic incidents. The " penitent " thief has lived

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through the ages. And Matthew heard him mock ; while Mark and John did not hear him say anything.

Mark says they gave Jesus wine mingled with myrrh before the crucifixion.

Luke says they offered him vinegar.

John says nothing about what was offered before the crucifixion.

Matthew makes them give him vinegar to drink mingled with gall.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke say there was darkness "over all the earth" for three hours ! Somehow nobody of note in the other portions of the earth noticed it, and there were a number of observant, thoughtful, chronicling men living at that time. Luke says it was "because the sun was eclipsed." Yet the Passover was held at full moon. And none of the watchers of the sky beheld this famous eclipse which is recorded by the inspired gospel writer. Neither did John. He heard nothing of it, yet he must have known that something should happen at such a time. "When beggars die there are no comets seen ; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."

Gibbon, writing of this, says : "Under the reign of Tiberius the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a perpetual darkness for three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence, of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. But the one

and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomena to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

John did not even hear of the rending of "the veil of the temple" which is cited in the Synoptics. This, too, must have been an astonishing event.

One is driven to the reflection that if the Chief Priests and Scribes had noticed these catastrophic signs and wonders, which must have been the talk of Jerusalem (even "over all the earth"), then in that magic-loving, wonder-accepting, sign-seeking age they must have believed that Jesus was the Messiah, or some one out of the common. Yet they did not. We can only surmise they did not notice the darkness or the rending of the veil of the temple, or any of the other wonderful things recorded, omitted, or contradicted by these amazing witnesses.

It may be as well here to quote Rabbi Wise, who wrote in *The Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth*: "The whole trial, from the beginning to the end, is contrary to Jewish law and custom as in force at the time of Jesus. No court of justice with jurisdiction in penal cases could or ever did hold its session in the place of the high priest. There were three legal bodies in Jerusalem to decide penal cases: the great Sanhedrim, of seventy-one members, and the two minor Sanhedrim, each of twenty-three members. The court of priests had no penal jurisdiction except in the affairs of the temple service, and then over priests and Levites only" (p. 66).

We have seen that Matthew, Mark, and Luke state Jesus had eaten of the Passover. John says the contrary. Rabbi Wise, in *The Origin of Christianity* (p. 30), says: "In the first place, the Jews did no public business on that day, had no court sessions, no trials, and certainly no executions on any Sabbath or feast day. And, in the second place, the first day



of the Passover never was on a Friday, and never can be according to the established principles of the Jewish calendar."

If we judge omissions of important matters as the equivalent of denials, and remember that none of the writers of the Gospels were eye-witnesses, and that one copied from the other, we are forced to the conclusion that their evidence is worthless.

We are quite willing to accept the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical hypothesis. We could picture this gentle figure, filled with love for mankind, his vision crowded with the things that might be instead of the things that were, if only people paid more attention to conduct, to living decently, thinking bravely, doing kindly, than to observing the letter of the law, or even to observing the law at all if it were useless or senseless, being persuaded at last that he was the real Messiah, a Messiah to lead men to the new Jerusalem, to the Kingdom of Heaven, and being put to death by the rigid upholders of the old order.

But those who describe his end do so in a fashion that makes us feel they are not telling the truth; they are inserting incidents for purposes of their own; they invent details just as readily as they ignore them. The picture is botched and blurred. All we could hope to say—and that mercifully and without justice—after reading the Gospels carefully is that Jesus suffered death probably upon a cross. That he was betrayed by Judas or gave himself up; that he was taken before Annas or before the Council or to Pilate; that Pilate sent him to Herod and washed his hands of the affair; that Jesus was clothed in purple or scarlet and had a crown of thorns on his head; that he carried his cross, or Simon carried it; that the two thieves mocked him, or only one; what was given him to drink; the day and hour of the

crucifixion—no one can say with certitude. If we accept one Gospel, we must spurn the others. Of what weight is such evidence?

And now we approach what is really the greatest recorded event in the history of Christ. It is alleged he rose from the dead. The evidence comes from people who never saw Jesus alive or dead. They would not be admitted as witnesses in a British court of justice, and their testimony to a *miracle* is valueless. But we will examine what they say.

We have already said that myths provide many parallels to the doctrines and tales we find in Christianity. We know from Christian writers that the early Christians borrowed right and left from pagan religions, and that they did not scruple to invent or forge to promote their own religion. Myths were powerful stimulants to such zealous propagandists.

Sir J. G. Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* ("Adonis, Attis, Osiris," p. 183), says: "At the festivals of Adonis, which were held in Western Asia and in Greek lands, the death of the god was annually mourned, with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women" (recall the "women weeping for Tammuz" in Jerusalem); ".....and in some places his revival was celebrated on the following morning.....In the great Phœnician sanctuary at Byblus the death of Adonis was annually mourned.....but next day he was believed to come to life again and *ascend up to heaven in the presence of his worshippers.*"

Krishna was crucified; there was darkness; he consoled the thief and hunter; he descended into hell; he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

The writers of the Gospels had plenty of material to work into their religion when they claimed Jesus was the Messiah and wished to make him a god, born of a virgin, who should die and rise again.

We will take the record of Mark first, again reminding the reader that this was the first of the Gospels, that it was written many years after the death of Jesus, and that its author never saw Jesus.

Mark says : Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, coming to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus, found the stone rolled away. One wonders what good the spices would have been if the stone had not been rolled away. Was it, therefore, easy to remove the stone and get at the body ?

A young man, clothed in a long white garment, said : " Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified ; he is risen ; he is not here : behold the place where they laid him.

" But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

" And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre ; for they trembled and were amazed : neither said they anything to any man ; for they were afraid."

Note the novelist's touch : "*neither said they anything to any man.*" If that is a fact, how did the writer learn of this incident ?

But that account is not *evidence*. Who testifies that Jesus is risen ? A man in a white garment, who says something to three women, which they tell to no man !

It carries not the slightest conviction to people of common sense. It is the kind of evidence that nobody listens to in any civilized country.

There is more in Mark, but it is rather a disgraceful more, for the ninth verse to the end of the sixteenth chapter is a forgery ! Ordinary people would be ashamed to palm off literary forgeries ; but in matters of religion people are so zealous they will not only forge, but actually declare the forgery to be the

“Word of God.” Some later writer, discontented with the abrupt ending of Mark, added some verses on his own account; and Christian leaders, though knowing this quite well, continue to circulate Bibles in which these spurious passages are included with Mark’s Gospel. It does not seem proper to offer Mark as a testimony at all if part of the testimony is admittedly forged.

Let us now turn to Matthew.

He says: “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

“And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.”

This is an amazing incident. From the death of the earliest of mankind until now people have desired to know whether life was continued beyond the grave and (or) what it was like. Yet nobody throughout the countless years or among the innumerable millions of men has ever given us an authentic word concerning the future life. Many have speculated. They do so to this day. Some have imagined hells, some harpful heavens, some sensual harems, and some a place where people talk almost a meaningless jargon and have to send messages for curious people on earth to write down on boards and slates. And we still long for the note of truth. Yet here is Matthew recording something as tremendous as the resurrection of Jesus: it is the resurrection of some ancient saints. Saints who have dwelt in their graves for some time are not sent on earth again for a trivial purpose. Nothing like this event has happened in our time. But, at any rate, we can feel sure of this: all Jerusalem must have heard of their resurrection. That was something that could not be hidden. No man is so dull or so foolish as not to be impressed by a visitor who was once dead and is alive again. These saints must have had their sepulchral ceremonies round them,

for they could have got no other raiment ; the scent of the earth lay heavy about them. They must have pungently arrested the attention of the first person who met them. "They appeared unto many."

The tragedy is, Matthew is so engrossed with the rest of the story that he overlooks the enormous importance of this incident, and does not tell us how these risen saints described the life they led after death. The grave seems to silence saints as well as sinners. Not even those who come back can give us a hint of what goes on in the hereafter. . Death stops all tongues.

And Matthew tells us no more. It is enough.

Nobody else ever heard of these saints walking about in Jerusalem. Mark and Luke and John, who were as "inspired" and as eager to impress the world with the truth of the Christian religion, never heard a word of this mighty story.

Matthew, as we can see, is an imposing witness.

He makes Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" come to the sepulchre. Keepers were there, but they were terrified of an angel who appeared. Mark's young man in white has developed into an angel with "a countenance like lightning." He tells the women Jesus has risen and will see his disciples in Galilee.

Mark told us the women did not breathe a word of this. Matthew says that as they went to tell the disciples they met Jesus, who also told them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee.

Then we get a new incident. The chief priests bribe the soldiers to say they had slept at their duty, and some one had stolen the body of Jesus. To tell any soldiers to proffer that tale is lunacy ; for Jews to have suggested it to Romans only betrays Matthew's industrious fancy.

Matthew adds that the disciples went to Galilee, *but some doubted.*

What kind of evidence is this? Three women become two. They talk instead of being silent—in flat contradiction to Mark. But they are said to have seen Jesus.

Set it beside Mark's account, and what force has it? None at all.

And that evidence concerning the disciples is scarcely convincing. Matthew, in effect, says Jesus did appear to his disciples, but some of them did not believe it was he!

Matthew turned Mark's young man into an angel. Luke, who wrote after Mark and Matthew, gets over the difficulty by saying there were *two* men "in shining garments." He mixes up the reference to Galilee by making the men in shining garments say: "He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you *when he was yet in Galilee.*"

And he adds words the pregnancy of which we shall see when we come to John's account: "Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

Luke makes the women tell the disciples. Peter ran to the sepulchre and saw the linen clothes. The interest this incident arouses in us comes from the fact that Mark is supposed to have written his Gospel at Peter's dictation, and that tremendously important item of news was never mentioned by Peter! Anything that Mark omits to mention should be regarded with deep suspicion, for we are told that not only did he get his information from Peter, but, according to Papias (quoted by Eusebius), he took care to *omit nothing of what he heard!*

Luke knows nothing of the meeting between Jesus and the women, but he introduces a story of two disciples going to Emmaus who were joined by Jesus.

*But they did not know him!*

And when he brake bread with them he *vanished*.

So they went to the disciples, and heard that Jesus had appeared unto Simon. But so far we have not had a hint of Jesus appearing to Simon. Simon ran to the sepulchre and saw the linen clothes, but no Jesus.

The extraordinary thing is that Jesus is alleged to have appeared suddenly in the midst of them, to have eaten some broiled fish and honeycomb, and then to have said: "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."

He led them to Bethany, and then was "carried up into heaven."

Matthew and Mark knew nothing of this journey to Bethany. And how is it that the disciples are told in two Gospels to go to Galilee, where Jesus will meet them, and in another to remain in Jerusalem?

This is not evidence that has the slightest weight. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus do not even recognize Jesus. An appearance to Simon is dragged in. Jesus is made to "vanish" and to be "carried up to heaven."

You can see the details accumulating as the Gospels get written.

Is Luke's tale, with its contradictions of Mark and Matthew, to be accepted? If so, what part will be reckoned as good evidence that Jesus was seen alive after his death? Nobody would accept a tale from a third and interested party that Jesus appeared to his disciples and then was "carried up into heaven." This is a miracle which needs a very great deal of corroboration, and it does not get it from Matthew or from John. Luke's account is unique in its "wonders."

John says Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre "when it was dark." Mary, the mother of James, and Salome have ceased to count.

She saw then neither a young man, nor an angel, nor two men in shining raiment, but merely the stone rolled away. It was enough for her. She ran to Peter, and said: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Peter did not run alone in John's account, though Luke suggests it; for John does not merely tell us he ran too, but that he raced Peter, which is a pleasant little touch on the writer's part.

But then we are told something which makes us ponder. Peter and John "as yet knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead."

This is obviously untrue, for Mark says (viii, 31): "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, *and after three days rise again.*"

Luke makes the two men in shining garments remind the women of this. Even the Chief Priests and Pharisees had heard it, for they went to Pilate, and said: "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again."

And "John" says Peter and John had never heard a word of it! That surely will not do.

Mary Magdalene stayed behind when Peter and John left, and then she saw two angels; and Jesus himself appeared to her, *and she knew not that it was Jesus*. She thought it was the gardener! John then details a short dialogue, and says Mary went back to the disciples and told them she had seen Jesus.

John next tells the story of Jesus appearing in the midst of his disciples when the doors were shut, and retails the incident with doubting Thomas.

Any one reading the "Gospel according to St.



John" would see that it really ends at verse 31, chapter xx. But just as some enterprising forger added half a chapter to Mark, so some one even more enterprising has added a whole one to John. *Chapter xxi is an addition by another hand.* It has not the touch of the old "John," and seems to drag in Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" overmuch; but it describes a miracle in which the mystic numbers 153 are mentioned. We are certainly of opinion that these fish miracles with symbolical numbers have an esoteric significance, particularly as "seven" pervades John's Gospel like a mystic scent.

But this miracle of the fishes is supposed to take place at least a week after Luke said Jesus had ascended into heaven!

There is no mention whatever of the Ascension in Matthew or John, though in one of the spurious verses added to Mark it says, "He was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God," which is not evidence.

It will, we think, be fairly conceded that if the fact of the Resurrection had to be judged by the four Gospel narratives, it being conceded that their evidence might be accepted, one would have to say that the case had not been made out.

The witnesses contradict one another from start to finish. If Mark is believed, Matthew, Luke, and John are discredited. If Matthew's version is accepted, then the others are unreliable. When, moreover, we realize that this evidence is produced by men who saw nothing of what they describe, that they all had motives for writing as they did, that they copied from other documents, that they lived in an age when the tales they told were similar to those told in other religions, that the veracious atmosphere of the time was polluted wantonly and studiously, we must

conclude that their evidence on so stupendous a matter as the Resurrection is worthless.

Loisy, in *La Passion de Marduk* (*Rev. d'Hist. et de Litt. Relig.*, 1922, p. 297), says:—

“The Gospels do not relate the death of Jesus. They relate the myth of salvation realized by his death, perpetuated in a way, by the Christian Eucharist, emphatically commemorated and renewed in the Easter Festival. The Christian myth is without doubt related to the other salvation myths. It is by no mere chance that the resurrection of Christ on the third day after his death coincides with the ritual of the Feast of Adonis. The Barabbas incident, the burial by Joseph of Arimathæa, the discovery of the empty grave, are apologetic fictions. The incident of the two thieves crucified with Jesus may well be of the same order. And there is no reason why their invention should not have been facilitated or suggested in one way or another by mythologies of surrounding countries.”

Matthew Arnold's comment is also worth quoting:—

“And the more the miraculousness of the story deepens, as after the death of Jesus, the more does the texture of the incidents become loose and floating, the more does the very air and aspect of things seem to tell us we are in wonderland. Jesus, after his resurrection, not known by Mary Magdalene, taken by her for the gardener; appearing *in another form*, and not known by the two disciples going with him to Emmaus, and at supper with him there; not known by his most intimate apostles on the borders of the Sea of Galilee; and presently, out of these vague beginnings, the recognitions getting asserted, then the ocular demonstrations, the final commissions, the ascension—one hardly knew which of the two to call the most evident here, the perfect simplicity and good faith of the narrators or the plainness with which

they themselves really say to us: *Behold a legend growing under your eyes!*" (*Literature and Dogma*, p. 151).

The legend growing.....It was a legend from the start. None of the narrators can say, "I saw Jesus." It is: "Jesus appeared to so-and-so—and they did not recognize him"; "Jesus appeared to so-and-so, but they doubted"! Till at last there is the daring stroke, and the story of the Ascension is concocted.

It is in this way that all legends have grown.

Man's fancy flies on strong pinions, and once he has breathed the intoxicating air of that place where no logic and no laws are, he shrinks from nothing. "Believe!" he cries. "You *shall* believe!" he says, as he strides abroad with sword in hand.

In the days when the sword propagated ideas, that was the way to spread "religious truths."

After the Resurrection it was but a short flight to the Ascension.

Krishna had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. All men saw him go.

Buddha ascended into heaven. So did Lao-Kiun. So did Zoroaster.

And though faith may manage it, reason refuses to believe any of them "ascended to heaven." It was a tale told by the credulous for the credulous.

Mark and Luke mention Christ's Ascension; but the mention in Mark is in that portion which was forged and added to the original Gospel by an overfervent and zealous writer. So Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who tells us the wonderful story of the Ascension. Every one will agree that it is a miracle of an outstanding order. It was one that ought to have impressed everybody who witnessed it.

But Luke himself did not witness it.

Neither, apparently, did Matthew or John. They, moreover, had never even heard of it, for they do not

mention it. We can conceive no level-headed man saying that the testimony for the Ascension is satisfying. Our view is that the testimony in favour of these miracles never is satisfying. It is purely a question of credulity. If people believe without the slightest examination what other people tell them, they can believe and so call themselves "believers." We suggest that in the circumstances it is far more honest and far more reasonable to be an unbeliever. There is no evidence worthy of the name in favour of the Resurrection and the Ascension. These tales are on a par with the fantastic fables of the Virgin Birth, the Temptation, the Incarnation, and the Fall.

What amazes us is the fact that the mass of Christians still accept blindly all the old tales and belief, while the studious ones among them throw over story after story.

"If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain." It is much easier for the undelving, unthinking Christian to take that as a *proof* of Christ's Resurrection than to weigh the evidence for himself. But so eminent a Christian as Baur said: "The question as to the nature and the reality of the Resurrection lies outside the sphere of historical inquiry. History must be content with the simple fact that in the faith of the disciples the Resurrection of Jesus came to be regarded as a solid and unquestionable fact. It was in this faith that Christianity acquired a firm basis for its historical development. What history requires as the necessary antecedent of all that is to follow *is not so much the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus as the belief that it was a fact*" (Baur's *Church History*, vol. i, p. 42).

The *Encyclopædia Biblica* practically endorses that view. The article on "Resurrection" should be read. We take from it the following conclusion: "For all that has been said in the foregoing paragraphs, the

most that can be claimed is that it proves the possibility—the probability if you will—of the explanation from subjective visions.....From the very nature of the case it would not be possible to prove more, for the visionary character of the appearances could not be established for us by the visionaries themselves, .....nor yet by the reporters, who simply repeated what the visionaries had related to them.....

“We remark that the doctrine of the government of the Church by Christ is one that can give place without any religious loss to that of the leading of the Church by the spirit of Christ.....That the cause of Jesus did not die with him on the cross we are assured by history, *even if his Resurrection did not occur as a literal fact.* It is undeniable that the Church was founded, *not directly upon the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus, but upon the belief in his Resurrection: and this faith worked with equal power whether the Resurrection was an actual fact or not.*”

It is an amazing confession from two such eminent schools of Christian learning, and should be realized by all Christians, who can now understand the value that belief has been to the Church.

The phrase, “If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain,” is not quite accurate. It should run: “Our preaching will not be vain so long as we can persuade people to believe that Christ rose from the dead.”

The vanity of preachers is kept alive by the credulity of believers.

We may add that most of the incidents recorded in the Gospels of the death of Christ are to be found in pagan myths. “The derision, the flagellation, both the thieves, the crying out on the cross, the sponge with vinegar, the piercing with a lance, the soldiers casting dice for the dead man’s garments, also the women at the place of execution and at the grave, the

grave in the rock, are found in just the same form in the worship of Adonis, Attis, Mithras, and Osiris" (Drews).

Resurrection and ascension were attributed to scores of gods before the time of Jesus.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE NEW TESTAMENT : THE GOSPELS—THE TEMPTATION—CHRISTIAN CRITICS

WE can deal only briefly with the books of the New Testament. If these books are inspired, they must be true. If they contain contradictions, they cannot be inspired. And they do contain manifest and manifold contradictions. To take a simple case: Mark says Jesus was crucified at the *third* hour; John says it was the *sixth* hour. One of these statements is not true.

Matthew says both thieves mocked Jesus. Luke says only one mocked him, and the other was to be in Paradise that day with Jesus. One of these statements is not true. If a New Testament had to be written to-day by, say, Dean Inge, Bishop Gore, Bishop Temple, and Bishop Barnes, it would have none of the contradictions, the foolish stories, and vain absurdities of the present New Testament. Religions have developed. With savage men they were savage; with civilized men they are civilized, although the thaumaturgic myths are as out of date as the buttons on the back of a morning coat.

It is as well to distinguish the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke from that of John. The first three are generally termed the "Synoptics," because they adopt a similar point of view, and generally give a synopsis of the life of Jesus. John's Gospel is a thing apart.

When were they written? Nobody can answer that question with any certainty. "We have abso-

lutely no good evidence that our Gospels existed before the year 130," says Mr. Joseph McCabe.

In *The Solution of the Synoptic Problem* Mr. Robinson Smith says: "The earliest known Gospel is the Gospel according to the Hebrews.....," which was written about 80 A.D. He dates Mark's Gospel about 105 A.D., Matthew's about 120 A.D., John's about 140 A.D., and Luke's about 145 A.D.

Others differ, putting Mark's earlier and Luke's Gospel before John's.

Baur told people they must choose between the Synoptics and John; they could not follow both. "Whether we look to its differences from the Synoptics, or to its general spirit and character, we see that it is impossible to allow such a Gospel as *the Johannine the character of a historical narrative, even in the limited sense in which the Synoptics can be called historical.*" So says Baur in his *Church History* (vol. i, p. 25). Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not very reliable, but John is hopeless, says in effect the great head of the Tübingen school.

To those Christians who have struggled to hold their faith, which every now and then a gust of fresh air threatened to blow away, these admissions of Christians must be disturbing. But there is no purge so healthy as purging the mind of error.

Our object being to see whether there are valid objections to the theory that the Gospels were "inspired," we shall not dally over the fascinating literary problems that are naturally beloved of church people. Did "Luke" write before or after "John" is an interesting problem, but we need not pursue it. It is sufficient for us that these Gospels contain statements obviously not true. Christians may continue to assert that God inspired those untrue statements, and we shall leave the matter to the common sense of people. These Gospels represent their age;



they reproduce the fantastic notions of the time, and have no more claim to be considered as God's message to mankind than the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, and no more claim to veracity than the Histories of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

We are treating the Gospels on broad lines, so there is no need to cover the ground again relating to the Virgin Birth story. We do not believe it, any more than we believe that a star "stood over where Jesus was." There were millions of stars "over" the young child, and when it is suggested that one of them *guided* some people to a house we feel the writer has drawn on a fearless imagination, or, more likely, on an old myth, particularly as we know that a star shone in the sky at the births of Krishna, Rama Yu, Lao Tsze, Moses, Quetzalcoatl, Ormuzd, Rama, Buddha, and others.

Let us look at the incident of the Temptation.

Matthew and Luke relate the Temptation with full details. John does not mention it. Are we to consider that John knew nothing of it? Or that, as he was writing from a different point of view, he thought it better to leave it out? Neither answer has much to do with inspiration, but we fancy the latter is the true explanation.

Mark disposes of the affair in one verse. "And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan ; and was with the wild beasts ; and the angels ministered unto him."

Paganism is written all over that. It is the kind of idea cherished and propagated by old, credulous, ignorant, fanciful, symbolical religious writers.

"Tempted of Satan.....with the wild beasts.....angels ministered unto him."

The crudity of the story is its own acid test. The statement is of something that can be classed with the "miraculous."

Who and what is Satan?

In the Book of Job it says: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."

So Satan was a "Son of the Lord." Satan is represented to us as the incarnation of evil, as one who is perpetually warring with God. Yet he is a "Son of the Lord." Whatever attributes and powers he had God gave them to him. So God gave him evil?

This notion, that an all-loving, all-just God creates evil and then sends his only son to preach repentance, is a story we cannot accept.

It would be interesting to know who these "Sons of God" were—probably the "Elohim"; but how Satan got in that galley or out of it the modern Christian would find it difficult to explain.

That a good god becomes an evil god is too terrifying a thought. If one god fails, may not another?.....There is the passage in Isaiah to be remembered (xlv, 7): "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace *and create evil*: I the Lord do all these things."

We also know that God and Satan are identified in the Old Testament, for in one book it says Satan tempted David to number the people and in another it says the tempter was God. We do not believe these foolish tales, and therefore the blasphemous contradiction is no more to us than the error of an ancient writer. But the Christian cannot dispose of the matter quite so easily.

There is no denying the godlike power of Satan, for it is set out in the Bible. Matthew and Luke have both detailed this tale of the "Temptation," and Luke has an illuminating line.

"And the devil taketh him up into an high moun-

tain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

"And the devil said unto him, *All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them ; for that is delivered unto me.*"

Jesus was a god, we are told. We are also told he was co-equal and co-eternal with God. He was therefore all-powerful. Yet, somehow, Satan possessed a power which God the Son had not got !.....In the verse we have quoted Satan is the rich man, as it were ; he has great possessions ; he makes an offer of kingdoms to Jesus the Co-eternal and Co-equal of God Almighty. What can anybody give God ? According to Holy Writ, the Devil had something with which he could *tempt* Jesus. The childlike author of this story would tempt a millionaire with a penny.

Jesus apparently accepts the situation, for he does not tell Satan that he can give him (Jesus) nothing. Both of them, being gods, knew everything. They could not make foolish remarks to one another. And Satan offers a bribe of all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus ! Jesus does not laugh at him or spurn him. Oddly enough, he says : "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God."

But Jesus was god. God does not worship God. And the words "It is written" suggest authority in a book. But the authority of a book is nothing compared to the authority of God himself. Jesus had no need to quote a book when talking to one who was a Son of God like himself.

If Jesus was divine and the co-equal of God, what could Satan give him ?

Any Board-school boy above the age of eight would say "Nothing." In that case, when Satan took Jesus on this high mountain and offered him the kingdoms of the world he offered him nothing, and therefore he did not tempt him.

The fact is we have the old myth dragged in, and these ancient writers had to haul in "Satan" and the silly offer of kingdoms. Symbolically something can be made out of the story. In *Pilgrim's Progress* events like that were a pleasing incident. Most of us have our trials, and there is no reason why they should not be described allegorically. But the old priests had no imagination. They had crude fancies; a mental crucible that changed the symbol into the actual and a spirit that made them desire to force others not to notice differences between the symbolical and the real. We see exactly the same sort of thing with the Eucharist. An idea is thrown out which is perhaps beautiful as a vision, a hint, a beckoning. And the priest comes along and grabs it as if he must put a collar and chain round a lark before enclosing it in a cage.

This Temptation story was borrowed from the Pagans. We have read that the Christians borrowed with both hands from other religions, and it happened that in the old Buddhist religion, where we find so many originals of Christian tales, there was a temptation of Buddha.

Buddha fasted, and the Devil came and tempted him, even going so far as to suggest that if Buddha gave up his fast he would become the Emperor of the World, which is very suggestive of kingdoms. And Buddha said to the devil: "Get thee away from me."

There is quite sufficient in that story to have provided "Matthew" or "Luke" with the kernel of an interesting incident.

But Mithraism, the rival of Christianity, also had a "temptation." One can almost see these early Christian writers on the prowl. They recognized all religions as providing religious material. Yet they spoiled the stories in the re-telling. They wished to

show that Jesus, their leader, had braved trials like Zarathustra or Buddha or the other god-men Saviours; and so, after Mark had thrown out the hint, Matthew and Luke copied and filled in the details. The forty days is the usual sacred number that was always dragged in by these "masonic" writers. It occurs again and again, and is no more to be taken literally than is Satan's offer of "the kingdoms of the world."

Lest somebody should think we have sounded too clear a note, we will quote the following from the article on the "Temptation of Jesus" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* :—

"The more we familiarize ourselves with the utterances of primitive antiquity, the more we are relieved from the difficulties incident to a literalistic and rationalistic reading of ancient religious records. Primitive antiquity delights in myths, and details derived from myths were not held to be misplaced in narratives the nucleus of which was historical. Indeed, even whole episodes might be borrowed from myths and adapted to their own needs by the writers of popular narratives without any sense of incongruity. How largely this is the case in the earlier portion of Israelite history is becoming known, and there is no sufficient reason for denying the existence of a more or less modified mythic embroidery in early Christian narratives. The narrative of the Temptation of Jesus is one of the most precious of these narratives."

In other words, our Gospel writers borrowed from the old religions, and embroidered Christianity with Pagan myths of which the "Temptation" is a precious example. And that is the view of learned Doctors of Divinity.

John's is a gospel *sui generis*. He reads, he discards; if he copies he alters. And he invents freely,

for he writes with a more glowing pen. It is because of his more spiritualized message that he tones down or omits references to events that do not help him for his etherealized philosophy and his Messianic figure, so that he could afford to omit references to the Sermon on the Mount, to the Temptation, to that inexplicable (except on frail and human grounds) cursing of the fig-tree, and solace himself with bold and splendid inventions like the raising of Lazarus.

That we find intellectual Christians on our side in this matter will be evident from the following quotations from the *Encyclopædia Biblica* :—

“The chronological framework must be classed among the most untrustworthy elements in the Gospels. Not only are the data often quite vague ; .....often also it is impossible to have any confidence when Matthew so frequently says ‘then,’ ‘on that day,’ or the like, or when Mark says ‘straightway,’ that the event really followed on what immediately precedes it in the narrative. Were we to take the Evangelists literally, an enormous number of events would have to be compressed within the limits of certain days, and there would be only a very moderate number of days of the public ministry of Jesus with regard to which any events are recorded at all..... The case is no better with the order of the narratives. So far as the rest of the Gospel is concerned, little confidence can be placed even on Mark’s order..... The alleged situations in which the recorded utterances of Jesus were spoken can by no means be implicitly accepted.....As for persons, neither the names of the women at the cross nor even the names of the twelve disciples are given in two places alike.....Several of the sayings of Jesus clearly bear the impress of a time which he did not live to see.....

“Taken as a whole, the facts brought forward in the immediately preceding paragraphs show only too

clearly with what lack of concern for historical precision the evangelists write.....

"The foregoing sections may have sometimes seemed to raise a doubt whether any credible elements were to be found in the Gospels at all."

Christians are told that John wrote the Gospel which bears his name and the Apocalypse. Scholars do not accept that view. So far as language and style are concerned, these two books are poles apart. Whoever wrote the one did not write the other. But the Gospel according to St. John is as full of errors as the Synoptics.

One quotation from the *Encyclopædia Biblica* will suffice: "A book which begins by declaring Jesus to be the *logos* of God and ends by representing a cohort of Roman soldiers as falling to the ground at the majesty of his appearance, and by representing a hundred pounds of ointment as having been used at his embalming, ought by these facts alone to be spared such a misundertaking of its true character as would be implied *in supposing that it meant to be a historical work.*" The italics are ours.

St. Mark says: "In my name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues.

"They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mark xvi).

Jesus is reported to have said that of all those who believed. *They could cure the sick.* Do Christians believe that? Here is an opportunity to put belief to the test, as Elijah the Tishbite is alleged to have done. Why should not the clergy go to the Cancer Hospital and show that what is in the Bible is true—or false?

And what about the phrase: "*and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them*"? Will they test that? I hope not. Christians generally show that they do not believe it. Yet Jesus said it, and it is in the Bible.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE NEW TESTAMENT (*continued*)—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

THE Acts of the Apostles is popularly supposed to have been written by Luke, because it is composed in a style similar to that of the Gospel and has the dedication referring to a "former treatise." Luke may have written a history of the time that followed immediately after the death of Christ, but the "Acts of the Apostles" is not it. This is one of those books that have been severely handled by later editors. It contains errors and misstatements like the Gospels, and the spirit of the time shows itself in the way the editor or author drags in signs and wonders and deliberately sets forth his thesis.

M. Loisy says the editor wished to transform the story he found into a sort of justification of Christianity—to show it as the full flower of Judaism culminating in Jesus the Messiah, and that he left of the original book scarcely so much as a skeleton. "What remains of the second treatise to Theophilus is not even a complete skeleton, for the original sequence of facts has not been respected."

M. Loisy does not spare the author or editor of the Acts. He suggests he behaved like an unscrupulous lawyer. "He wasted his time, and he almost deserved to waste it. He fully succeeded in deceiving the Church over certain circumstances about her origins that she was quite ready to forget."

These early writers, as we know, had not the ability to set down things truly. They were all, in a way, thesis or tendency writers. They wrote long after the



events they described had taken place, and they wished certain views to be held concerning those events. Their principles were not fine in matters of narrative. It was far better to persuade than to be true. They had the pens of pleaders. So tales were altered and wonders were introduced, though the simple sincerity of the time now and again burst through like a spring and watered it with dewy freshness.

But it is all man's handiwork. Fallible man spreads himself all over this tale that is told. The period after the death of Jesus has an interest for all of us. It was a critical time: would the seeds planted by Jesus grow, or would his voice be as one of those calling in the wilderness?

The Acts of the Apostles purports to give us part of this history, and that makes it valuable. But it is not inspired. It gives us the pleading of one and the jottings of others. Also, it has the inevitable contradictions. These were unavoidable. Even if this book of the Acts was written only sixty or seventy years after Christ's death, one sees how hopeless it must have been for the writers to get at the truth. Everything would be second or third hand. In those days legends grew like figs. The age of wonder produced wonders. Harnack suggests that the man who "inspired" the earlier chapters (i-xv) was an even more credulous person than Luke himself. "St. Luke has not dared to narrate such stories where he himself was an eye-witness, but he trustfully accepts them when they are vouched for by this authority (or authorities)" (Adolph Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 148).

"There can be no doubt that the Primitive Community very soon began to embellish the story of the last days of our Lord with local legends, according to their own taste and with a view to their own glorification. This accretion of legend was facilitated by the

fact that after twelve years the apostles left Jerusalem, and only returned thither on short visits.....The dispersion of the Christians of Jerusalem during the Great War gave the opportunity for such a luxuriant growth of semi-doctrinal legends concerning the appearance of the Crucified in Jerusalem." Professor Harnack sees these legends reaching Luke in later life, after he had written his Gospel. "Now, however, St. Luke has met with what he thinks still better information, though it is really inferior; now the Ascension is visible like the ascension of Elijah; now it takes place on the Mount of Olives, and that after a period of forty days of continuous intercourse with the disciples. If it is thought incredible that St. Luke could have exchanged the tradition of St. Paul and St. Mark for that which appears in his Gospel, then it ought also to be thought incredible that he should have given up the latter tradition in favour of that which appears in the Acts.....Hence it follows that St. Luke has *twice* exchanged his better knowledge for that which is worse."

Professor Harnack thinks it possible that the myth of Christ appearing for forty days after the Resurrection grew naturally, and was not taken, like so many of the stories woven into the Gospel narratives, from other myths. In any case, he labels it myth.

Dr. Otto Pfeleiderer throws over all the stories in the Gospels that relate to Jerusalem, and suggests that the tale of Christ's reappearance should be associated with Galilee. He puts it clearly, though not in the way Christians, who believe in the inspiration of the Bible, will accept. He says: "We find ourselves, therefore, in the position of being obliged *to deny all historical foundation* to the group of narratives of the Easter appearances at Jerusalem" (p. 5). "But the mere examination of the witnesses shows that their narrative cannot be taken as a literal transcript of the

facts; they give merely a transmutation of what actually occurred *under the influence of the growth of legend, of apologetic reflection, and of allegorizing imagination*" (p. 8). The italics are ours.

It is difficult to find a serious scholar who will accept these New Testament writers seriously. If we turn to the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, we find the same frank story: "The sections in which, as an eye-witness, the writer [of the Acts] gives the narrative in the first person plural may be implicitly accepted. But it may be regarded as equally certain that they are not by the same writer as the other parts of the book."

The Christian may say that it does not matter who wrote the book if it or he or they were "inspired." We agree. The great difficulty is to detect the inspiration. The Church has said these books are inspired, and yet they are shown to narrate the inharmonious and the incredible. It seems quite clear that we should do wrong to attribute to the inspiration of God a book that has manifest errors. These early historians were even more fallible than the historians of to-day, who claim no inspiration.

Let us quote a little more from the article on "Acts of the Apostles" from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*: "Even were he following an old journal, he could never have passed over so many important matters in silence simply because they were not to be found in his notes. Further, he contradicts the Epistle to the Galatians so categorically.....We must, therefore, conclude that the sections in question come from a document written by an eye-witness, the so-called 'we' source, and that this was used by a later writer, the compiler of the whole book....."

"Apart from the 'we' sections, no statement merits acceptance on the mere ground of its presence in the book.....With regard to the speeches, it is beyond doubt that the author constructed them in each case

according to his own conception of the situation. In doing so he simply followed the acknowledged practice of ancient historians.....It is not Peter who needs to recount these events to the primitive Church already familiar with them ; it is the author of Acts who feels called on to tell his readers of them." (See Peter's speech, Acts i, 16-22.)

During the whole of the lifetime of Christ and after his death Christ's followers were observing and practising Jews. In the Acts of the Apostles we get the apology for the appeal to the Gentiles, for the new theology. It is very interesting ; it shows us how men may interpret words and so turn the currents of millions of lives. At the death of Christ, considering the poverty of his following, the whole of his teaching might have slipped into oblivion, and the Scribes and Pharisees have gone on interpreting the old Mosaic law as it is done in the synagogues unto this day. But some one insisted on giving to the Gentiles not merely the crumbs that fell from the Jewish table, but the whole Gospel of Jesus. And then there came the battle over circumcision ; there came the slow evolution of doctrine and church government and sacrament, of which Jesus and his disciples knew nothing. And the head and front of this new propaganda was one Paul. He had to face Peter. Peter, who was a Jew, had to be converted to the bigger programme and the wider view. He who compiled the Acts of the Apostles took care to set that view well forward. He paid little attention to the other apostles, but Paul and his companions and Peter were put in the forefront of the narrative. And they are made to appear to dwell together in harmony. What Paul does, Peter does ; they are both alike in outlook. It is excellently put.

And the compiler did his best to please the Romans. Jerusalem had been destroyed when he was probably

a youth. The Christians were now scattered ; many were in Rome. Rome ruled the world.

M. Loisy says frankly that the compiler of Acts of the Apostles took the original script and turned it practically inside out, while leaving the real author to bear the onus—since the compiler or adapter or redactor left in the “ we ” passages as they were. But he did this acting in concert with others ; it was not a thing he could have risked alone. Loisy thinks this compiler may have belonged to the Roman community. “ He who deformed Luke’s work did not do it for himself, for his own personal interest, or to deceive posterity ; he worked for a sect, and in the interest of the Christian communities turned Luke’s history into special pleading.” (See *Les Actes des Apôtres*, by A. Loisy.) For the theologian this book has a particular fascination. Dogmas begin to sprout here. One catches in the Acts the first green shoots of what has subsequently become Christianity. But it is not our object to pursue these paths, interesting though they are. We are concerned with belief, and we have been told that the Acts of the Apostles is a book inspired of God.

We cannot admit that a book which was edited by nobody knows who, and contains stories impossible of belief, because they are contradicted in the book itself or in the Gospels, or manifestly invented, ought to be said to be inspired. We are of the opinion that the word of God will not be self-contradictory, will not give rise to all sorts of conflicting theories, will not be considered false and unhistorical by the most learned scholars in the Christian Church. And so we place the Acts of the Apostles beside the Gospels, an interesting fragment from an interesting time in the development of mankind, but a book that only the careless will regard as history and only the very credulous as “ inspired.”

## CHAPTER XX

### PAUL AND THE EPISTLES

PAUL, the little hook-nosed, bow-legged, fanatical tent-maker, is one of the great figures of the world. But did he write the "epistles" that are attributed to him? We quote from the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (col. 3,625). The italics are ours :—

"With respect to the canonical Pauline epistles, the later criticism here under consideration has learned to recognize that *they are none of them by Paul*; neither fourteen, nor thirteen, nor nine or ten, nor seven or eight, nor yet even the four so long 'universally' regarded as unassailable. They are all, without distinction, pseudepigrapha (this, of course, not implying the least depreciation of their contents). The history of criticism, the breaking-up of the group which began as early as 1520, already pointed in this direction. No distinction can any longer be allowed between 'principal epistles' and minor or deutero-Pauline ones.....

"The 'principal epistles,' like all the rest of the group, present themselves to us as epistles; but this is not their real character in the ordinary and literary meaning of the word. They are not letters originally intended for definite persons, despatched to these, and afterwards by publication made the common property of all. On the contrary, they were, from the first, books; treatises for instruction, and especially for edification, written in the form of letters in a tone of authority as from the pen of Paul and other men of note who belonged to his entourage: 1 Cor. by

Paul and Sosthenes, 2 Cor. by Paul and Timothy, Gal. (at least in the exordium) by Paul and all the brethren who were with him ; so also Phil., Col., Philem. by Paul and Timothy, 1 and 2 Thess. by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. The object is to make it appear as if these persons were still living at the time of composition of the writings, though *in point of fact they belonged to an earlier generation*. They were from the outset intended to exert an influence in as wide a circle as possible ; more particularly to be read aloud at the religious meetings for the edification of the Church, or to serve as a standard for doctrine and morals. Hence it comes that, among other consequences, we never come upon any trace in tradition of the impression which the supposed letters of Paul may have made—though, of course, each of them must, if genuine, have produced its own impression—upon the Christians at Rome, at Corinth, in Galatia ; and the same may be said of all the other canonical epistles of Paul."

The reader will understand how these epistles were sent out in the name of Paul if he will think of the Tariff Reform agitation started by the late Joseph Chamberlain. Imagine that agitation taking place when there was no printing press. Chamberlain's speeches would be subject to the usual tricks and frailties of memory as well as to the zeal of fervent followers. After his death his name would carry weight. Letters would be written alleging that he said certain things, whether he had said them or not. Epistles by A, B, and C would be flung aside, but if they came as from Joseph Chamberlain they would carry authority, and so they would go out in his name. The fraud would be discovered when some enthusiastic Tariff Reformer said Joseph Chamberlain had said a ten per cent. duty must be levied on imported wireless sets, for somebody with a little

knowledge and a little courage would point out that Joseph Chamberlain died before wireless sets were heard of. It is by similar knowledge and similar courage that Christian critics to-day unhesitatingly write of these so-called Pauline epistles: "*They are none of them by Paul.*"



## CHAPTER XXI

### THINKER OR BELIEVER ?

RELIGION has been a fact of great importance in the history of the human race. As soon as men began to get civilized, and leaders of tribes saw the necessity of rules being obeyed, the "word of the Lord" became a rod of severe, enjoyable, and advantageous dimensions. The tribe had to be frightened somehow into obedience. Even as knowledge widened acquiescence was demanded. And there naturally grew up vested interests.

In the most ancient of religions people believed just as sincerely as they do to-day. Even if the god demanded the sacrifice of the nearest and dearest, belief was not affected. Gods were thrown on one side certainly, but that merely meant there was a change of belief. If A beat B, the followers of B would be likely to adopt the god of A. But those were merely incidents. The religion—no matter what it was—did allow some one to formulate laws and give him or them a means of being obeyed. That was the great advantage of religion in the days of man's intellectual childhood. The religion was pure invention ; all the tales associated with it came from man's imagining ; but the people accepted without question the priest's story that it was the word of the Lord, and were kept from rebellion or abruption.

Fear has been one of the most tremendous facts in the history of the world. It is the one thing the mother instils into the offspring. Without the sense of fear the family died. Fear saved the lives of the

race ; it was as important as food. And fear is always taught in the impressionable days, when it is never forgotten. To-day, in London, the pigeons will fly at once when they hear a sound like a gun. The mother taught them that. Mother pigeons have taught their chicks that since guns were an enemy. But guns are no enemy in Trafalgar Square, yet the pigeons still keep up the useless flight when they hear somebody's engine backfire.

And religious fear in ancient days made people observe certain sanitary rules, or welded the tribe together for defence or achieved something probably beneficial to a growing if ignorant community. Religion clearly has had its uses.

And any one who cares to read history can see how religion has developed. We no longer sacrifice to Moloch. We do not indulge in Bacchic festivals or Feasts of Tabernacles ; we do not think of tribal gods and tell scandalous tales about them ; we have introduced into our religions a streak of noble conceit which has purified the old creeds, as our sanitary arrangements have improved our towns and homes.

It is all a matter of progress. There has been progress in the intellectual as well as in the physical world. Knowledge has been gathered and applied. We do not believe the things that were believed in Christ's day, any more than we have vehicles similar to those they had.

The religion that Christ preached and practised is vastly different from the Christianity of to-day. Jesus was a worshipping Jew. He revered the Sabbath. All Christians have thrown over the Sabbath of the God of the Bible and adopted the day sacred to Mithraism. There are many people in parts of Scotland, for instance, who will work hard, play football, bagpipes, mouth-organs, and get drunk on the seventh day of the week—"the Sabbath of the Lord their

God"; and on the first day, the Sun's day, the day sacred to Mithraism and sun-worship, they will insist on the sackbut, psaltery, and all instruments of music being put on one side while they behave with a gravity of demeanour like to that displayed by conscious Calvinists at the house of John Knox.

The followers of Jesus, after he was dead, had no acquaintance with such dogmas as the Virgin Birth, the Divinity of Christ, the Trinity, Transubstantiation, Purgatory, the Immaculate Conception, and the Infallibility of the Pope. The mother of Jesus, for instance, knew of none of these things. She even thought her son mad; so we can easily see her point of view. Yet to-day she has been enthroned by the Roman Catholics beside the three Gods of the Trinity. The Roman Catholics have slowly and prudently made Mary, the mother of Jesus and James and many other children, a goddess.

The changes that have taken place in the religious world have been as varied and as vital as those that have taken place in the world of arms—with which, of course, it has always been very closely connected. If one tried to imagine Jesus living in different periods of the Church's history, one would have a picture as incongruous as belief and reason.

Jesus himself would have no sympathy with the dogmas and doctrines that have been formulated. If one reads his life and follows his teaching, one sees that he concentrated on conduct. All great religious leaders have done that. Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus talked all the time of conduct, and practically nothing of creed. Priests have always preferred belief to behaviour. Jesus told people that if they wished to inherit eternal life they should keep the commandments. No priest says a thing like that to-day. As the centuries rolled by and the ecclesiastical mind became more and more ecclesiasticized, the noblest men

were told that if they kept all the commandments they would go to hell if they did not believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, that he rose from the dead, and that the bread and wine in the Eucharist turned into Christ's flesh and blood respectively.

The development that has taken place in doctrine can be seen in actions of the Church. It was considered the first duty of Christ's followers at one time to catch witches and burn them. Nowadays neither the Pope in the Vatican nor the Archbishop in his palace believes in witches, although ancient popes and archbishops were as firmly convinced that such creatures existed as Roman Catholics to this day believe that bread and wine become flesh and blood. Joan of Arc, for instance, was condemned for heresy and burnt alive; but the Church that condemned her then now calls her a saint. Galileo was summoned before the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition for daring to make public the result of a scientific discovery. The Holy Fathers who framed the dogmas for Christians and kept the faith unspotted from the world made Galileo recant his theory that the sun was the centre of the world. That theory was considered irreligious. As one sees, religion has really nothing to do with facts: it is a question of belief. Everybody to-day knows that the Pope and the cardinals and all the Christians, who believed what they were told, were wrong, and that Galileo was right. And, of course, the Pope and the cardinals and all Christians to-day openly believe what Galileo was condemned for believing in the seventeenth century! The believer can feel pretty sure he will be thrown over by his successor in the next century. What will people a century hence think of the present-day squabble over "reservation"?

In reading Christ's life and understanding his character, we cannot imagine him agreeing with these

condemners of honest men, any more than we can picture him at the Vatican in the time of Alexander Borgia without protesting against the life that ruled there ; any more than we can imagine him sitting as a member of the Holy Inquisition and calmly sentencing some poor creature to be tortured and then burnt alive because he could not believe in transubstantiation.

Through the ages religions have changed, and few have changed more than Christianity. That may be due to the terrible wars and persecutions that have unfortunately been the chief fruits and resources of Christians. Also to the fact that the law of change operates with religion as with all other things, and that, as science grows, religion is able to make less and less of an appeal not only to scientific minds, but to those who accumulate even a small amount of knowledge.

There are still, of course, many believers. It would be interesting to know how many of them have put their creed to the test. We mean a test, that is, of the kind that would be applied in any other branch of knowledge. We know, for instance, that many people who are accounted clever are believers, though we do not know how much they believe and how much they disbelieve of the Christian faith. Dr. Colenso, for instance, was a bishop till he began to make a test for himself. In all probability he never would have made the test if he had not been asked pertinent questions by poor savages. Civilized Christians don't ask these pertinent questions, and so the Colensos of to-day are rare.

We must remember that it is not easy for any Christian to make a thorough test of his faith. It is difficult for a man to throw over his political creed (we do not refer to those politicians who leave sinking ships or dash for those making for harbour) ; it is far

more difficult—it needs courage—for a man to throw over his religion. There is his family to consider. His friends are ready to regard him not merely as a traitor, but as a moral and social leper. Religion engenders or engineers an atmosphere that can make the non-believer a sort of pariah or outcast. This atmosphere is far less unkind now than it used to be. In the days of the Inquisition it was unbearable. Now it merely throws out contumely, reproach, scorn, loathing, boycotting, and persecution. This naturally makes it hard for many people to declare themselves boldly as non-Christians. It obviously demands a certain amount of courage; though, candidly, most find this atmosphere bracing after the foetid air of creeds.

Anything that checks inquiry, speculation, or truth is bad. The sympathy—or is it scorn?—of Christian people goes out in full measure to those who are Mohammedans, for they are not allowed to accept anything as true which is not mentioned in the Koran. It is the same spirit that prevails in those Christian communities in the Daytons of the New and the Old World, where what is not in the Bible is not true. Daytons are much commoner than people imagine. It is difficult for children who have been brought up to believe the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, to be comfortable with a book of elementary science. Many able men have applied themselves to the task of making this operation less disturbing and upsetting for Christians, but they have not quite succeeded. It is probably best for the old type of Christian not to read any book of science.

The fact is, belief is a thing apart. Knowledge is one thing, belief is another. Religion was devised in the day when there was little accurate knowledge, and it was necessary to have something to keep people in order. One must either think or believe. The

more we think the less we believe. The less we think the more we believe.

The time seems to have come when believers should make the courageous gesture. What Bishop Colenso did surely the average Christian may do. All that Dr. Colenso did was to try to answer the question of the poor Zulu, who asked him, after hearing some tale recorded in the scriptures, "Is that true?"

Every Christian should make a determined effort to discover the truth and stand by it. It may take a little study and a little courage, but truth is worth it.

How is it that so many people shrink from inquiring at all into the fundamentals of their own particular creed? People who are ready to analyse Confucianism, Mithraism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, will stand as if shocked if there is any suggestion that Christianity should be analysed. What must not be analysed cannot stand analysis.

The troubles of the Christian are sown in childhood. No one seems able to escape that fearful sowing. Just as the pigeons that fly in Trafalgar Square are taught things that are worse than useless to them now, so civilized people of to-day in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America are taught to reverence old creeds simply because their parents were taught them. The mothers of to-day bind their children's minds as the Chinese mother fills the land with groaning from the baby girls whose feet she binds. The pity is that mind-cramping does not make children groan. If it did, we should be a much wiser and a much happier race.

Belief is instilled with fear. It is a tragedy. Those who have to get rid of their beliefs afterwards go through great mental struggles from which wise parenthood should have saved them. It is far finer to teach a child to think than to believe. If Christianity is true; if there are three Gods; if one of them came to earth and was conceived of a virgin, and rose

from the dead, let young people learn of it when they are capable of understanding it; why thrust it into them with fear? Why tell them of Satan? Of Hell? Of things unknowable, improbable, unjustifiable? Why tell them things that you yourself do not understand?

There is little hope for the race that produces believers rather than thinkers. Any one can swallow what he is told. How is it that the churches are filled more and more with women, while one cannot help but see that the majority of those who lead the world intellectually refuse to go to church because they refuse to accept the doctrines of Christianity?

The believer has an idea that, at any rate, if even his creed be wrong he has not done himself any harm; while, if there is a hell, he may have escaped it by believing in it. It is the argument of the non-thinker and the coward. The Mohammedans send non-believers to Hell, but we know they have no more justification for their threats than the Christians. Certainly Mohammedanism was wonderfully successful with the sword, and took Constantinople from the Christians; but we cannot agree with those Mohammedans who take the view that success in combat proves truth. Or with those Christians who take similar views when they win.

The future of the race has always been in the hands of the mothers, for they mould the children at the impressionable age. It is they who instil fear into the child. They have to frighten it so that it will not recklessly cross the road or play with strange dogs or pick up live coals. They do it with a shriek and a snatch and a slap: they communicate fear to the child. And there is the solemn moment, too, when the child says its prayers in a dim light, and the mother talks.....

It is a picture one does not wish to disturb. We



can all recall it. There is about it a sanctity and a beauty that one would not willingly ruffle. But what does the mother *know*? Nothing but what she was taught in her childhood from her mother. And what did her mother know? Nothing but what she was taught in *her* childhood. And so it goes back through the ages. And the child goes ploddingly through the religious immersion.

Sunday, that day sacred to the pagan, is a day set apart by the Christian for a ritual of behaviour that has taken centuries to perfect. In many of the homes of this land Sunday is recognized as a day on which all things must be clean. The Saturday night bath heralds it; the clean shirts and collars all proclaim it. On this day father is at home and the house has a peculiarly taut atmosphere. There is no other day in the week like it. Even breakfast is frequently different on this day.

These may seem trivial things; but they are not. They are all bricks in the religious edifice. These details, insignificant though they may appear, are important links in the religious chain. Sunday is made into a day unforgettable and egregious. It does not matter that it is not the real Sabbath—that it is a pagan day; it is a day set apart for religion, and will be associated with religious worship as long as the child who went through that early training lives.

There is the walk to church. Perhaps father and mother march together and the children follow after. They are all in their best clothes, and there is about them an air of lacquer. The church bell rings and marks the day as clearly as any almanack. Ever after the ringing of the church bell arouses memories that lead one back to childhood's days—and religion.

The smell of the church, the cloudy light, the stained-glass windows, the surplices, the majestic notes of the organ, suggesting to a child the instru-

ment of a mighty school-master, the hymns, the quaint cocoa-like voice of the priest—it is unforgettable.

The dinner on Sunday is *the* meal of the week in many provincial homes. And the parlour, that sacred room, with its graveyard atmosphere, has its door thrown open on Sunday, and children are told to be careful not to damage the furniture, till they regard the parlourish aroma, the snores of father, and the decayed bloom on the wax flowers as something to do with religion. It is part of Sunday: Sunday is essentially a part of religion.

All trivialities, and yet all helping to harrow and prepare the soil for religious subservience. For tales are told. Children like to read about Samson or Jonah or Daniel in the lions' den. But certain dogmas get thrust home. Jesus Christ came to die for us, for little children. He was crucified by wicked Jews. And slowly, with regular Sunday conforming and patient drilling of minatory dicta, a certain measure of religion is inculcated. "If you do that, God will not love you." "You won't go to Heaven when you die if you do that."

Confirmation takes place at an impressionable period in the child's life. What is told is not told as to the reason; it is all an appeal to the emotions—fear, hope, wonder, awe. And Hell is for unbelievers.

But slowly the wave of emotion subsides. One day the youth has a flash of common sense. He has noticed the incongruous, the something that has offended his reason. Perhaps father is strict and walks about like a combination of judge, jury, and executioner; so the youth goes to his mother. She does not attempt to reason with him. She cannot. She probably had the same kind of doubt herself when she was young, and was desperately afraid of any one knowing. She thought at the time she was doomed for Hell. But she prayed and prayed and

prayed, and somehow got over it. So she enfolds her darling in her arms and kisses him and fondles him, and tells him to pray and to trust God and to believe, and it will come right. And he is not to think about those things any more. It will all come right if he will only believe. And she prays for him.

In such ways is religion thrust into the young. The atmosphere is all-embracing ; it is the strongest of all Christian arguments. Reason never raises its head. It is not allowed. Common sense is forbidden to deal with religion.

But the child is troubled with it again. And now he has taken the measure of mother's mind, and does not go to her. He quickly loses his faith—his creed goes.

Or he fights his reason and remains a Christian, and carries on the old customs.

Both pictures offend. Children should be taught to use their reason, and hold nothing sacred but truth. If people believe in the Christian religion, it should be only after they have satisfied themselves it is something they can believe. Nothing is worth holding, nothing is worth following, nothing matters, that is not true. Believers are afraid. They think that their creeds are true, but it is a "feeling" founded on hope, begotten of fear, and they naturally engender a choking, checking, hampering, blinding atmosphere. How can a virile race grow up in such an atmosphere? Believers are like people who refuse to open a window or a door, or even pull up a blind, lest fresh air and light should get in the room. Fear insists on that.

This believing atmosphere is one that breeds superstition and folly and woolly thinking. People imagine the planet Venus has something to do with love, and that Mars has an "influence" for war ; they believe that a pack of playing-cards will tell your "fortune,"

and that if you spill salt, go under a ladder, sit thirteen at table, catch sight of a magpie, or something equally ordinary, natural, or inevitable, some evil is being foreseen and foretold. Why do people *believe* these things? They were told them as truths by their mothers when they were young, and to throw aside what mother said needs effort.

And so we have got into the way of swallowing stupidities that people who had been trained to think would reject or eject at once. You cannot expect to train people to accept what they are told, to swallow the incredible as true, and at the same time make them bold speculative thinkers. Galileo had good reasons for saying that the earth went round the sun, but the believers did not want his reasoning. What they were anxious about was not truth or knowledge, but their creed—the ideas of people who had lived thousands of years ago. So they put Galileo in prison.

The gullibility of believers is well shown in an incident that happened during the recent War. Mr. Arthur Machen, a well-known London journalist, wrote a story called *The Bowmen*. He imagined the old archers of Crecy appearing before Mons and aiding the British. It was a pretty conceit, and made a pleasing story. But there are few things more tempting to the believer than belief. It is the insubstantial, the unreal, the mysterious, that is at the heart of all religions, and the habit of accepting the unreal and the mysterious is too great to be missed.

The thinker reading Mr. Machen's story would appreciate its pleasant fancy, and swallow it like a mouthful of sack. But the believer has an altogether other mentality; his way of looking at most things differs from the thinker. His fancy sours at once. He is not critical; he is not a realist; common sense has nothing to do with him. He *believes* the story.

It is the kind of story he has been taught to believe, and that he loves to believe. Sermons were preached on the "Angels of Mons" by clergymen who had never been near the Borinage. They said the angels had really appeared. Mr. Machen wrote to explain that the tale was pure invention on his part; he had seen no angels or bowmen; he had imagined it all. And some believers were so eager to believe that they refused to accept Mr. Machen's story; they said there must have been angels at Mons! Mr. Machen's words are worth quoting: "Some ass, whose name I have no desire to recollect, wrote me a solemn letter charging me to walk humbly and to give thanks for having been made the vessel and channel of this new revelation."

One does not wonder that believers have seen visions and "had revelations"!

People who insist on believing maugre evidence are inharmonious beings in a reasonable world. One can imagine a tender-hearted believer saying to some one accused of witchcraft: "Ah! You may say you are innocent; you may think it; but the Devil has you." Belief leads anywhere but where common sense is. That is the pity of it.

To-day scientific men will tell you that you cannot hope to read a paragraph in the daily press about a scientific matter that is really intelligently written. We produce loose thinkers. The way to make people think is to make them examine things, make them critical, analytical, logical. But that is the antithesis of religion, which says: "Close your intellectual eyes and believe."

It is doubtful whether the average Christian to-day knows one tithe of the tales that have been told as truths by the Church. The miracles of the Roman Catholic Church are a revelation of what the believer can accept. Incidents that an intelligent doctor would

put down to hysteria or hallucination or suggestion are told quite seriously as precious miracles. Gullibility is rampant. The reasoning standard of the people is stunted.

That race which can manage to get its people to face truth frankly will lead the world intellectually. The Puritans saved us politically and damned us intellectually. The French missed their Cromwell, but they got their Voltaire. The Russians will astonish the world in a couple of generations, for, now that they have got rid of their priests, they will look on the world with clear eyes, and let us know what they see.

We may, perhaps, appropriately here anticipate the question: And would you do away with religion?

We reply, We would do away with nothing that is true, nothing that is good or useful for mankind.

We wish we could persuade not only individuals but Governments to adopt the essence of Christ's teaching. We believe the world would be a far better place if people sincerely tried to translate into their lives the essence of Christ's teaching. Christ never talked about a Trinity, or a Virgin Birth, or an Immaculate Conception, or Transubstantiation, or bishops, priests, and deacons. He talked about conduct. He told people how to live well; he said that if they lived well they would inherit eternal life. We will follow wherever Truth and Reason will lead us. We cannot believe what is not reasonable.

The issue is one between the believer and the thinker. The believer is one who accepts what he is told regardless of its probability. If he inquires into the truth of the creed, he finds there is no evidence to confirm it. On the contrary. But the Church does not budge. The Church merely says "Believe," and the faithful do so. But if your mind is so peculiarly formed that it cannot believe what is false

and preposterous, then you have to be an unbeliever. In the circumstances we consider that is the honourable position.

We might as well say here frankly, for the question is inevitable—we pretend to no knowledge of God. The fool has said in his heart there is no God. He is equally a fool who pretends to know all about God. So far as we can judge, and we pose as a mere average man, we have been unable to catch a glimpse of any distinct or direct revelation of God to man.

It seems to us as if the world went on without any interference from God. Of his attributes we know nothing. The world is manifestly cruel, "red in tooth and claw." We see one thing slaying another in a most savage way. To deny that there is cruelty in the world is to deny evidence. That is only possible to a believer. On the other hand, we find men with such noble thoughts, men making such wonderful discoveries, that we feel there may be a wonderful world of which we know nothing.

But we will not lie about this matter. We are not believers in the creeds of Churches. We have only reason to guide us, and we feel that if we trample on that we have renounced everything that is decent in manhood. We are not afraid of the future. Death has no terror for us. We would rather at the last feel that we had made a stand for reason and truth than that because we were cowards we bowed with the many and attributed to a God all the foolish and preposterous actions that are written of Him in the Bible.

It is time the world shook off its superstitious fetters. It will not do so without an effort; it will not do so unless reason is unbound and truth makes its appeal. Only when reason and truth are more appreciated by the average man and woman than custom and creed shall we have hope of a better world.

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